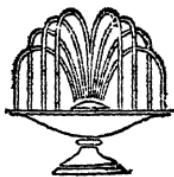


SINGING BEACH

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by

ELIZABETH FOSTER



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TO MY MOTHER

*So many times the terrace, yet love is unended,
Love has not died.*

—EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY, *The Hardy Garden*.

This is a fabulous island. It cannot be found on any map of the coast of Maine. The only character in the book who was drawn from life is the horse, Lion, whom I remember with affection and regret.

CHAPTER I

THE town of Port Hard, Maine, dozed placidly. Long-haired cats came and went on secret errands along the dusty street, and plump sparrows bathed unmolested in the clean white dust. The cats were not in a predatory mood, for it was a sleepy afternoon. For the first time that season a warm, brilliant sun was pouring light and heat down upon the houses and the rocks, removing the last traces of a damp and chilly spring from the coast of Maine, and every one as a result, including the cats, was relaxed and indolent. From the hill above the town came the soft, insistent clang of a bell suspended from a cow, and from the sea rose the whine of an outboard motor. The warm air was heavy with the rich scent of gasoline and oil from the lobster boats and the nostalgic and not unpleasant odour of rotting seaweed.

The town was apparently deserted, with the exception of Linda Heseltine, who was sitting on the hard wooden steps of the combined grocery, meat market, dry goods emporium, and lobster pound drinking sarsaparilla. She was not especially fond of the beverage, but soft drinks were the only diversion she could find in Port Hard in the middle of the afternoon. She was in a highly irritable frame of mind because the bus from Rockland was almost an hour late; she was restless and bored, and the steps of the general store were growing increasingly hard.

Linda was obviously not a resident of the town. Even a casual observer would have known at once that she was one of the "summer people" from the dark island which lay humped along the horizon five miles out to sea. She was clad in a one-piece garment, a seersucker playsuit which showed off her long brown arms and legs to advantage, and on her feet was a pair of moccasins made by the Indians at Old Town. Her brown hair was long, hanging well down to her shoulders in back, and over one ear she

had placed a nosegay of white flowers. Her fingernails were blood red, and so—had she removed her moccasins—were her toenails. On the steps beside her lay a sword-fisherman's cap, an odd, rather startling piece of headgear made of white canvas with an enormous peak which served as an eyeshade, protection from the brilliant sun and the glitter of the Atlantic. She looked slightly out of place on the steps of the general store, as a gardenia might have looked had any one dropped it by mistake into a bed of nasturtiums.

She turned now as the door opened suddenly behind her and exclaimed: "The bus—did you find out what's happened to it?"

"Nope. They don't know."

"Damn!"

The captain of the ferryboat which had brought her to Port Hard let the door slam behind him to keep the sound of her cursing from the men inside. "What's it to ye?" he inquired mildly. "Port Hard's as good a place as any to spend the afternoon in, ain't it?"

"I could have played tennis at home," she said disgustedly. "Why did I come, anyway?"

"That's what I been wonderin'," he exclaimed dryly. "'Tain't like you to come over here just for the ride and spend the afternoon sittin' on the steps of the general store. What you up to, anyway?"

"None of your business," she retorted amiably. "I was bored at home—that's all."

"That ain't the truth, and you know it. Got a fella comin' on that bus?"

"Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies."

"You're up to no good, I can see that. You've got that devilish look in your eye. Somethin's brewin'—hope it ain't a hurricane."

She had no intention of revealing why she had come to Port Hard that afternoon, but the old man had his suspicions. After a time he said: "Curiosity killed the cat, Linda! Ain't you old enough now to know better'n to

waste your time like this? This here Mister Shadblow, or whatever his name is—he's twice your age, and besides that he's *married*. You——”

She cut him off angrily. “Oh, do be quiet! I didn't come over here to see the Chadournes at all. I didn't come for that.”

“Mebbe,” he grinned, unconvinced.

“Angel Face,” she added grimly, “you take too much on yourself. It's *my* business, what I'm doing in Port Hard.”

“Maybe so. And then again, maybe not. I hate to see you goin' to the bad. Look at your clothes!” he added in contempt, pointing to her bare legs. “It's all right, I suppose, for you to run around the island naked like an Indian, but I don't hardly think it looks right in town.”

The old man stared down at her with unconcealed disapproval. Her bare legs offended his sense of propriety. Also, he did not care for her red nails and painted lips. She was no longer the simple little child he had dandled upon his knee. Once, she had been a darling; but now she looked more like the whore of Babylon. He scowled at her red nails, forgetting in his disgust that those same slender hands were capable of raising and lowering a sail in a violent wind, and the beauty and the soundness of her bare legs escaped him completely. “I don't like the way you're turnin' out,” he said, finally.

“You don't have to look at me,” she answered.

He was chewing cut plug, and he aimed carefully at one of the cats on the other side of the street, hitting it fairly and squarely in the middle. The cat jumped with a snarl of outraged dignity, and the old man laughed helplessly for a moment. Then he went back to the business in hand. “What you goin' to do with your life, Linda?” he asked paternally. “Get married, I suppose. I hear over on the island that you're goin' to marry that Laurence feller. Is that so?”

“No,” said Linda definitely.

“Then what?”

"That's none of your business either," she told him. "In fact, you're pretty fresh. What's it to you, what I do with my life? Who are you to tell me what I should do?" She said it amiably enough, but there was a warning note in her voice. There was something which she was keeping to herself, and she had no intention of revealing it to the Captain, or any one else, if she could help it.

Her eyes wandered away to the other side of the street, where in the long grass the huge coon tomcat was licking his wounds. His head moved up and down with a slow, rhythmic grace, removing the last traces of the Captain's spittle. His tongue was a lovely shade of rose pink, and his long immaculate hair gleamed in the sunlight with the patina of burnished bronze. She looked at him in silence for a moment, forgetting the man beside her and the irritation caused by the long overdue omnibus in her appreciation of the animal's grace and beauty. Her fingers closed around an imaginary pencil, and she yearned to draw him, just as he was at that moment, posed in the long grass with the dignity of an outraged lion. When she got home to the island and her pencils it would be too late—the poetry and grace of his quiet movements would have vanished. She knew from experience that flashes of beauty like that were illusory—they escaped you if you were unable to draw them immediately.

And yet, she could not wander around with a pencil and a sketch-book in hand, much as she wanted to. She was desperately afraid of being laughed at. She knew what they'd say over on the island; and chances were that they would compare her to the rabble of unknown, would-be artists who infested Port Hard every summer, and make a funny story of it. They'd say: "Linda has become one of the great unwashed—she's a painter now." Either that, or they would be curious to see what she was doing. And she wasn't ready to show any one her sketches yet. She knew, without having any one tell her, that they were perfectly terrible. They were crude and clumsy and wooden, and none of them was much better than the crayon draw-

ings she had turned out in such numbers in kindergarten; but nevertheless they were hers, she had a certain fierce, secretive pride in them. Bad as they were, she felt towards them as she might have felt towards a child who was not quite right in the head—something to be protected and kept decently out of the way.

The Captain's voice rose above her abstraction like the warning drone of a foghorn. "If you keep on playing with Laurie like a cat plays with a mouse you'll lose him, and he's too good a feller to throw away like that. He's what you need, I figger. You'll take a lot of handlin'. You need to marry someone who'll take a reef in your sails before you get caught in a storm and upset. You better take him now and not go on teasin' him. You'll lose him, sure. I seen it happen before. You'll wake up some day when it's too late and find out you were in love with him. All this philanderin' on beaches ain't goin' to get you nowhere. Now, now, I seen you!" as she opened her mouth to protest—"I know what you was up to last night. I seen you down on Fiddler's Beach. It's a crime the way you're leadin' that young feller on. You've no right to take him out in the moonlight and let him think you're goin' to make an honest man out of him when you get around to it."

"How you do go on!" said Linda unpleasantly. "You talk as though I was a silly, romantic little fool. Believe me, Angel Face, I want something more out of life than sex!"

The Captain winced—that word was taboo as far as he was concerned. He passed it over, however, because he wanted to get to the bottom of this matter quickly, once and for all, before the bus came and destroyed their privacy. "What do you want," he asked grimly. "Money?" Laurie, incidentally, had none. He was making a salary of thirty dollars a week. You could live nicely in Port Hard or on Camel Island on thirty dollars a week, if you were bred to it, but he suspected that Linda would find it difficult. It was not that Linda was terribly extravagant; she

was—well, she was “summer people.” “It would do you a lot of good, I’m thinkin’, if you had to live like us folks on thirty dollars a week—it wouldn’t hurt you none and it might bring you down to earth. Life ain’t no picnic, Linda.”

“My goodness!” said Linda crossly, “you talk like a ‘parlour pink.’ I suppose you think I couldn’t live on thirty dollars a week?”

“Yes.”

“Money,” she said, “has nothing to do with it. It’s just that I’m not in love with him. That’s all. I’m devoted to him, and I must admit that I like kissing him in the moonlight, but as far as getting married is concerned, I don’t want to marry anybody. I may get married some day when I’m around thirty, but I don’t want to get married now.”

“What do you want?” he repeated. “If it ain’t money, what is it?”

“I don’t know, exactly,” she replied truthfully. “I don’t really know what I want out of life.” Her voice trailed off ruminatively. No one could understand—she hardly knew herself what it was she wanted out of life; but she was beginning to realize that it might have something to do with a pencil and a piece of Whatman paper. In time she would know which way she was going, but now it was enough to wander along the island on foot looking for things to draw.

She changed the subject.

“These Chadbourne people—what do you suppose they’ll be like?” she asked him abruptly.

“I dunno. Ain’t they found out anything about them yet?”

“No. They’re still a complete mystery. All we know is that they’re English.”

“You’re kinda curious about them yourself, ain’t you? I knew what you was up to when you took the ferry.”

“Yes, and now I’m sorry I did it. The bus is late, and I have to sit here, and I get lectured by you.”

"That'll learn you to mind your own business next time."

"That's good, coming from you! You've been minding my business for the last half-hour. What makes you think you can get so fresh with me?"

"Because I seen you born. That makes us awful intimate."

"I'll thank you to forget that little incident."

"I can't forget it. It was the worst thing I ever went through. If there hadn't been a storm, it would have been all right. I could have got a doctor from Port Hard, but—"

"Don't let's talk about it now," she said firmly. "I'm in no mood to hear what you did that night. I sometimes wish you'd left well enough alone. Then I wouldn't have any troubles. I've always said, if I'd been given a chance to say whether I wanted to be born, I'd have said 'Nothing doing.'"

"What's the matter—don't you like it here?"

"In spots."

"You'll feel better about life when you get married. I always said a woman ought to get married. Look what happens to them when they don't. Look at your Aunt Harriet!"

"I know, but I'm not going to be like that."

"Your Aunt Harriet," added the Captain, "is awful sore about lettin' these English people on the island. I hear she's makin' it hot for Mrs. Gayly."

"You hear too much," replied Linda. "I know all about it, but I don't see why you should go poking your nose into it."

"What's her objections? I think it would be a good thing to have some new blood on the island. We're gettin' awful provincial. Why doesn't she like the idea?"

"She's nervous about them because they aren't in Debrett or Burke's Peerage."

"What's that—Burke's Peerage?"

"It's like the Social Register."

" And what may that be?"

" It's a stud-book—it's where they register all the first families."

" What for?"

" Oh, it's a crazy idea, I'll admit," began Linda, when her sharp young ears caught a familiar sound. She broke off with a cry: " The bus! the bus! Here they come!"

The profound stillness of the village was shattered by the tinny sound of the ancient bus being rapidly driven down-hill. They could hear it bounding from side to side through the village from the highroad in evident haste. Several other people heard it too, and the village woke to a semblance of life. The cats and the birds scattered in alarm, and a crowd of women, small children, and lobstermen straggled out into the little main street. The bus rounded the corner and drew up in front of the general store with a flourish, its antique brakes screaming in protest, and a sudden hush fell on everything. The crowd of villagers stared diffidently at the occupants of the bus, wondering what sort of foreign goods had been deposited in their midst this time, and Linda, from the vantage point of the top step, peered over their heads with a frank stare. To her surprise and disappointment Mr. Chadbourne was middle-aged. He had a lean, rather ascetic face and hair already grey around the temples. He was distinguished, and gloomy. Linda turned her attention to Mrs. Chadbourne, whose appearance was more stimulating. She was extraordinarily lovely. Her eyes were slate blue, her brows dark and thick, giving her a faintly Celtic air; due to fatigue her face was quite pale, but this only enhanced her beauty. She was admirably clothed in a smart Cumberland tweed suit and a felt hat to match, and she was carrying a dark-green leather dressing-case and an alligator purse. She seemed distracted, and very tired.

The couple stood there indecisively in the middle of the street while their luggage was removed from the bus. Linda, who wasn't missing a trick, noticed that the well-worn suitcases and handbags in front of her were covered

with a rash of European labels—St. Antoine, Deauville, Taormina, Bad Nauheim, Oslo. The mystery of the Chadbournes deepened. “Glory!” thought Linda, “what in the world are they doing here in Port Hard?”

It was quite apparent that Mrs. Chadbourne was not especially happy. Linda knew what was the matter: the Englishwoman had come a long way and found Port Hard at the end of it; and she could imagine how the town must look to her when she was accustomed to the glamour of Le Touquet and the Cap d’Antibes; how sober, dull, and uncompromising the square, austere houses and the narrow dusty street leading to the tiny harbour would seem if you had summered on the Côte d’Azur. The island, of course, was a little different. That at least had charm. The thing to do was to get Mrs. Chadbourne there quickly, and if possible erase the depressing effects of Port Hard before she changed her mind and went to Bar Harbour.

Linda moved swiftly.

Nicholas Chadbourne saw her coming and thought: “Can this glamorous creature be my landlady?”

Linda greeted him without formality. “Hallo!” she said with a grin. “You wait here a minute and I’ll get a boy with a wheelbarrow and we’ll move all this stuff down to the ferry. Captain Angel is supposed to handle this, but he’s skipped as usual.”

“How do you do?” said Nicholas diffidently. He was naturally shy, and ten years of wandering over the face of Europe had increased rather than diminished this flaw in his personality. He looked at her sceptically and said: “You’re Mrs. Gayly——?”

“Lord, no!” said Linda. “I’m her cousin, Linda Heseltine.”

“My name is Nicholas Chadbourne,” he told her stiffly.

The crazy thought slipped across Linda’s mind that this was not his real name, but she dismissed it promptly. So many mysteries had been woven by the islanders around this English couple during the past few weeks that she was catching the habit.

She went off in search of a wheelbarrow, and Nicholas remarked: "Awfully primitive!"—meaning the conveniences of Port Hard.

"Well, they warned us," replied Edwina. She added: "That girl was very thoughtful about the wheelbarrow, don't you think? She seems nice. Did you notice her legs? Rather lovely, weren't they! She has a pleasant voice. Nothing twangy. If she's a sample of what we're going to find over on the island it may not be so bad. Cheer up, darling!"

"Did I say I was depressed?"

"No, but I can tell from your subdued manner that you are."

"Do you think that it looks like Scotland?"

"No."

"They said that it would."

"I know, but it doesn't."

A wheelbarrow appeared around the corner, pushed by a handsome young lobsterman in faded dungarees.

"Here's the barrow," said Edwina with relief. "Now we can get along."

"I agree with you about the legs," said Nicholas reflectively, watching Linda's progress along the street. "Nice modelling. I wouldn't say she had much on under that garment."

"Nothing at all, probably," agreed Edwina. She began to collect her belongings. The bus was still crowded with odd boxes and bundles, all the annoying paraphernalia of a summer pilgrimage; liquor, books, magazines, tennis rackets, fishing rods, picnic baskets, and last of all a large wooden paintbox of the type used by professionals.

"Go and buy us some food, dear," she suggested to Nicholas as she pulled them one by one out of the bus. "I'll manage this."

They had been warned that there were no stores on the island—all marketing was done in Port Hard. Nicholas turned and went into the general store. It was dark and cool among the bins of vegetables and patent breakfast

foods, and the store smelled pleasantly of cinnamon drops and fresh bread. Yellow oilskins and sou'westers were hanging from the rafters, and he stumbled over mounds of clean white rope waiting for the lobster boats. A man in rubber boots was softly playing a guitar in the small office off the main room of the store, idly picking out a tune from "Snow White." Nobody paid much attention to Nicholas. His eyes ran along the shelves of canned goods with a baffled expression, trying to remember what they needed in the way of supplies. While he was standing there Linda came in the back door of the store from the direction of the sea. She was looking for him. She said apologetically: "This is a nuisance, I know—having to buy all your food over here—but you'll get used to it."

Nicholas smiled wanly and made no comment.

"Camel Island is awfully primitive, you know," she said uneasily. "I don't know what you're expecting. It's awfully small. I suppose you think it's about the size of Bermuda."

"No," said Nicholas.

"But it isn't. It's tiny. It's only two miles long and half a mile wide."

He said nothing beyond: "Oh, really?"

Linda wondered if he was shy, or just British.

She also wondered why he had chosen little, obscure, Camel Island as a summer resort. But she had sense enough to know that owing to his typical national reserve it would take her a long time to find out. She did not press the matter but added: "The island is so small, unfortunately, that everybody knows everybody else's business. I'm just warning you."

The Englishman grew a little pale—or maybe it was her imagination.

"You may not like it at all," Linda warned him—chiefly because she adored the island and because she could not bear his unfavourable comments if the shortcomings of her home were borne in upon him too suddenly. "Lots of people don't like it. I wouldn't be so crazy about it my-

self if I hadn't lived there always. I was born there, you know," she added, and then stopped—remembering that the British discouraged confidences unless they knew you intimately.

However, she had roused his interest. He said, with an exclamation of genuine surprise: "Were you? But it's very wild, isn't it? How did they manage?"

"Oh, it's a long story," replied Linda, regretting the fact that she had brought up the almost indecent subject of her birth. "You'll hear it from Captain Angel before the summer's out, so I shan't bother to tell it to you. The ferry's waiting. Shall we go?"

Nicholas paid for his purchases and they went out into the blinding sunshine, through the back door which led to the dock and the waiting ferry.

Linda could see that he was faintly depressed, and she wondered how he was going to feel when he finally reached the island and discovered what it was like. Camel Island was inconvenient, uncomfortable—if you measure comfort by such things as modern plumbing and electricity—lonely and crude. She wondered whether he knew, if her Cousin Clarice had told him, that there was only one superannuated tin bathtub in the cottage he had rented for the summer, and that the water supply came from an artesian well which went dry with unfailing regularity every August, and that, perversely, the roof leaked whenever it rained too hard, wetting the beds, and that the cottage was all of fifty years old and had very nearly fallen into the sea three years ago during a gale?

Of course, these were only incidental annoyances if you were used to them. Juniper Cottage was by far the most attractive house on the island, pictorially speaking. Someone years ago had planted a few dozen perennials on the slope which ran down to the sea. It was a wild garden now. Everything bloomed with the happy promiscuity of flowers which have been left to their own devices in a spot which pleases them. The lupines were in bloom, and the slope was a mass of rich dark-blue flowers poised between

the blue sea and the sky. Linda had passed them that afternoon on her way to the ferry, and she had made a mental note that it would be nice to paint them next morning when nobody was around. She doubted if she could make a very good job of it, but anyway it would be fun to try. . . . Her attention sprang back to Nicholas, who was saying something about the island.

" You're giving it a very bad name, you know!" he exclaimed lightly. " You mustn't do that."

" I'm just warning you. The trouble is, you're English, and the English don't understand us—I mean, how we live."

" Then it's time we learned," he returned dryly.

" Juniper Cottage is really terribly nice," added Linda feebly.

They reached the ferry. All the luggage had been put aboard, and Edwina was sitting in the stern of the boat surrounded by cartons, duffle bags, and hand luggage. She looked tired and worn, and her expression was one of resignation. Nicholas avoided her eyes and looked instead at the gulls floating above the pilot house of the dilapidated little boat.

Linda sat down upon a crate of oranges and thought: " How strange they seem—how out of place—here on the ferry!"

CHAPTER II

WHEN the bus broke down Edwina decided that it was a bad omen.

She was almost psychic with fatigue by that time, having been up since half-past six after a wretched night spent in one of those horrible American " sleeping cars "; and when the omnibus blew out a tyre she was so exhausted that she was viewing everything with that peculiar, devastating clarity which comes usually at four in the morning. Her impulse had been to turn around and go back again

to New York, but she couldn't let Nicholas see how weary and discouraged she was or he would collapse himself. It had been her idea to spend the summer on the coast of Maine, in lieu of something more populated. From Portland on Nicholas had been in one of his "moods," indicating that all this misfortune was none of his doing. She had held her tongue patiently and hoped for the best, but the remainder of the trip had been difficult. And when the omnibus—that horrible little bus they found at Rockland—broke down miles from a garage and left them stranded for the better part of an hour she felt that Nicholas was partially justified in giving way to the sulks—the whole trip *was* all wrong, somehow. Nothing had gone smoothly or pleasantly. All those awful changes from one train to another in the dawn, with all that luggage—then the unfortunate omnibus—and now this terrifying, weather-beaten, ramshackle ferry!

She was almost positive that something would happen to them before they reached the island, and her mind was heavy with premonition. No trip which began with such heart-rending lack of enthusiasm on Nicholas's part could ever turn out well—it was an omen.

The ferry churned away from Port Hard, and Edwina reflected gloomily as the boat slipped down the harbour towards the open sea that drowning was supposed to be a comfortable death. Self-pity was a habit which Edwina ordinarily deplored, but now tears welled up in her eyes and she had great difficulty in keeping them in check. She was afraid of letting Nicholas see how blue and homesick she was, and she turned her head away and looked blindly out over the water. She must not let him know how depressed she was, because he probably felt much worse. "After all," she reminded herself with small comfort, "if it weren't for me he wouldn't be here at all. He wouldn't have to come to a God-forsaken place like this and pretend to like it."

There was a faint hope still in her breast that he would be happy on the coast of Maine . . . he had liked stranger

places before. That funny little town in North Germany, for instance, a doll's village built on the shores of a pale-blue lake where you sailed all day in small boats with vari-coloured sails and bathed among the lily pads. It was only a quiet, mild little German Spa, and yet both of them had loved its charm until the constant strain of having to *heil* Hitler had made them leave. They had left under a cloud because Nicholas had finally lost his temper and said what he thought, and they had been told politely but firmly to get out of Germany without delay, or else . . .

Edwina gave a shudder. "At least," she thought, "nothing as terrifying as that will happen here—we may be bored but at least we'll be safe."

She opened one eye and looked at Nicholas guardedly. He was slouched against the gunwale of the boat talking to the girl. He seemed interested in what she was saying, and perhaps he was. Ordinarily he did not care for the society of the young; he said they were intolerant and conservative. However, he was being quite decent to her. They were talking about the weather—a nice, safe subject which would lead to no unfortunate questions from Miss Heseltine, who had seemed startled and inquisitive when they got out of the omnibus, as though she wondered—with reason—why two English people had travelled three thousand miles to spend the summer on an obscure island off the coast of Maine.

While Edwina was looking at Nicholas she happened to catch sight of the shore line behind his head, and for a moment or two she forgot him. The ferry was still going down the harbour, which was long and narrow and a good two miles from the open sea. The trees, dark and richly green, came down to the very edge of the water; there was hardly a foot of beach to mark where the forest ended and the sea began. In some places the trees had been cleared away by some seagoing farmer to make room for wide, clean meadows and neat potato fields. It was the informality of the relationship between the water and the land which struck her. Obviously this ocean was not a stormy,

uncomfortable element to be feared and treated with respect, but a very docile body of clear blue water which wandered in and out among the hills and the fields at will, leaving nothing unkempt behind it. The land was lush and green and smelt of warm sun on pine needles mingled with the salty, pungent odour of the sea. The air was crisp and bright, and the dark-green sweep of the shore line, the yellow rocks, and the immaculate white farms sparkled with sunshine and cleanliness.

It was very stimulating. If Edwina had not been so depressed by the journey she would have been more excited by the passing shore line, but she was still conscious of the fact that it was vital, alive, dramatic, and beautiful.

Nicholas mentioned something about the deep blue of the sky, and Edwina's eyes dropped to the paintbox at her feet with a troubled frown. This country, unfortunately, was so brilliant and so full of colour that it might be extremely difficult to paint. There was a peculiar quality of light and density about it which might baffle even the most expert colourist. Nicholas was in danger of painting what he called a "pretty picture" with all that wealth of blue in the sky.

Just then the ferry swung out into the open sea, and Linda exclaimed: "Look!—there's the island."

The girl's voice had a note of excitement in it, and Edwina smiled to herself dejectedly. She wondered what it would be like to be twenty again and passionately in love with an island, or a house. She could remember crying at that age: "Look!—there's the house—there's Prince Setton—over there among the trees!" Helplessly, she thought about England again . . . the bluebells were in flower just now in the copse below the Home Farm, and the deer were standing knee-deep among them; the cool, moist air was full of the scent of new green leaves and ferns and hawthorn. In all probability the hawthorn was dripping with rain, and it would slap you in the face if you went by too hurriedly, and dislodge a shower of crystal globules. . . .

"Come and look, Edwina!" exclaimed Nicholas, rousing her out of her abstraction with a jerk. "Come and see the island."

Obediently, Edwina got up and stood beside him at the rail. Her future home lay sprawled along the horizon like an indolent dromedary. It had only one hump, because the sea captain who had named it had been an indifferent zoologist who had never known the difference between a camel and a dromedary. Edwina wondered whether she could point this out without sounding rude; and Nicholas, mistaking her silence for disappointment, became slightly alarmed.

"It's lovely, don't you think?" he said uneasily.

If Edwina did not like the island—having chosen it as a summer resort—he simply could not bear it. He wanted to feel excited about it himself without any misgivings. He thought it was extraordinarily lovely in perspective, but he wanted Edwina to feel the same way. He needed comfort. That wretched girl had upset him with her dark innuendoes about the life on the island; it all sounded horribly primitive and quaint.

Edwina nodded, finding her voice and dismissing the subject of camel versus dromedary as of no importance. "It's the colour that's so wonderful!" she cried. "That dark green—it's almost black! And the yellow rocks, and the sky, and the sea——!"

Nicholas relaxed again contentedly against the gunwale. If Edwina thought it was fun to paint, then everything was all right. Nothing else mattered very much, certainly not the plumbing or society to be found on the island. If he could paint one decent picture and send it to the Academy, the summer would not have been wasted.

Edwina was thinking that if she could persuade him that the island was worth painting he could be happy there. It was very beautiful, but she knew that she must keep reminding him of the fact if she wanted him to settle down and enjoy the summer. Nothing must come between his visions of the sea and that astounding blue sky.

Not even a shred of cumulus marred the blue veiling that stretched from the horizon back to the dark shore line, and it had the clear brilliance of a patch of speedwells and the same transient innocence.

She said to him: "Look at the sky, darling! Isn't it amazing?"

"Absolutely marvellous," he nodded, with enthusiasm.

Linda told them cynically that it was a weather breeder. "We'll probably have rain to-morrow," she announced, adding, "and I'm afraid that if we do your roof will leak—it always does. I've been telling Mr. Chadbourne not to expect too much. The island is not especially comfortable, even in the best of weather."

She looked at them speculatively, thinking that if you were bred to the life of the island you could endure its crudeness, its lack of creature comforts, the wind and the rain and the chilly nights. But if you weren't, it would seem incredibly damp and uncomfortable. And these English people were exquisitely civilized. She could not imagine either of them being really happy during one of the semi-weekly debauches known as a "picnic" on Fiddler's Beach. She looked at the Englishman in his immaculate grey flannels and very nearly burst out laughing as she tried to think of him in a pair of faded, soiled dungarees eating clams out of a bucket.

For some reason Linda felt a little depressed. She wanted every one to enjoy the island, because she loved it so passionately herself. And she was quite sure that the Chadbournes would hate it. Aloud, she observed that there was only one bathtub in Juniper Cottage. "It's made of tin, and the paint is chipping badly."

Mrs. Chadbourne, however, remained calm. "That doesn't worry me," she replied. "I was brought up in the country in England, with hip baths and hot-water cans. And as for Nicholas, at Prince Setton——"

Nicholas scowled at her, and she stopped abruptly as though the subject of Prince Setton was not allowed. Obviously she had forgotten herself. She gave the man

beside her a swift look; and when her voice came again it had lost most of its humour. She said to Linda coolly: " You needn't worry about the plumbing, as far as we're concerned, I assure you."

" There's no electricity either," added Linda helpfully. Edwina replied: " There was no electricity at home." She hesitated a moment, and then she said with a smile: " What's the matter with us—don't you think we'll fit?"

Linda blushed uncomfortably, for that was of course exactly what she did think. She muttered something unintelligible, and Nicholas laughed at her confusion.

" What *is* the matter with us?" he demanded.

The girl looked at him for a moment in silence. The colour ebbed slowly from her face until it was a normal pink; and having recovered her equanimity she said, looking him straight in the eye: " Well . . . I can't understand why you want to spend the summer on Camel Island. We've all wondered why you didn't go to Bar Harbour. The island is terribly dull. We adore it, but it's awfully dull. . . ."

Nicholas Chadbourn's face froze slowly. While she spoke his expression became withdrawn, reserved, and utterly blank; and now that it was too late she realized that she had made some fatal mistake. . . . After all, it was none of her business whether they spent the summer on Camel Island or not. They had their own reasons for coming there, and her question was impertinent.

Fortunately, Mrs. Chadbourne distracted his attention by exclaiming: " Nicholas! What are those things over there?"

All three of them looked over the side of the boat and saw dozens of little red-and-white blobs of wood covering the sea in every direction. " What are they?" she repeated. fascinated.

" Those are lobster pots," Linda informed her. " Angel Face is going too close to them. He'll get his propeller fouled if he doesn't look out." She hoped sincerely that

he would run foul of them to pay him back for his remarks about her virtue.

"Oh!" said Edwina, surprised, "is that the way they catch them? How perfectly fascinating! Do look, Nicholas!"

Nicholas was uninterested. He felt suddenly tired and moody. Edwina's unfortunate reference to Prince Setton had upset him. And the girl's inquisitive eyes, coupled with the remark: "Why didn't you go to Bar Harbour?" had destroyed his peace of mind. Naturally every one upon the island to which they were bound would wonder what they were doing there, and it would be only a matter of time before they found out.

His lips moved unhappily. "Though I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea . . ." They had come such a long way—three thousand miles—and even here it seemed impossible to live as human beings.

He leaned his head wearily against the pilot house and gazed rather abstractedly at Linda, who was looking unconsciously into space and wondering whether she would have boiled or broiled lobster for supper. . . . His eyes absently followed the line of her throat, which was silhouetted beautifully against the clear blue sky. Then they dropped to her legs and her feet. . . . English girls usually had enormous feet, but over here they seemed to breed them smaller, and her legs were beautifully made too.

There was nothing even faintly sensual in his expression as he looked at her. At the moment his interest in Miss Heseltine was purely academic. As far as he was concerned she might have been carved from alabaster. No, the warm terra cotta used by the Egyptians. Now that he came to think of it she reminded him a little of Nephretiti; her neck had the same elongated, swanlike course to it; and her face in repose had the lovely half-smile. There the resemblance stopped. He was far more interested in the Egyptian queen as a woman than in the girl who was in his line of vision.

She turned and caught him looking at her; and she blushed.

He was about to exclaim impetuously: " You look very nice when you blush—do it again!" but he stopped himself in time.

It was hardly the thing to say to a girl who was twenty years younger than he was, especially as he had known her a scant half-hour. She looked away quickly, and he wondered what mad impulse had prompted him to think that she was pretty, but her looks were a little too flamboyant for his taste. He preferred English girls who were not so aggressively tanned and healthy.

" What in the world are you scowling about?" demanded Edwina at his elbow in a whisper. " You look frightful!"

Nicholas laughed, and blushed suddenly.

Linda was fascinated, because she had never seen a middle-aged man blush with quite such abandon and she wondered what it was all about.

" Look, Nicholas!" Edwina continued, taking him by the arm, " look at those boats out there! Aren't they a nice bit of colour?"

Two dories, one orange and the other a sallow pea-green, were being towed across their bows by a white lobster-boat. Nicholas looked at them thoughtfully and said, half to himself: " I hadn't expected so much colour! I think I'm going to like the island. . . ."

He looked at Edwina. She smiled back at him and there was something heart-rending in her smile. His heart was torn, and he resisted an impulse to get up and fling his arms around her. She was so gallant. Poor Edwina! She didn't give a hang whether the colour of those boats was wonderful or not; she was thinking only of him. He was ashamed of himself, bitterly ashamed. But for him, she would be having a nice time at Frinton or some other English watering-place, among her own people. The girl was right; Edwina belonged in a resort like Bar Harbour, not on this dinky little half-savage island. Edwina was

young—only thirty-two. She had a right, still, to happiness. Soon it would be too late, and he was to blame. He gave her a wavering smile, and his heart seemed to be torn in shreds. Edwina looked back at him with the old, starry look in her eyes; and it was as though she had driven a knife into his heart.

He rose abruptly from his seat beside the pilot house and went around to the other side of the boat.

Linda's voice floated after him. "We'll be there in about five minutes now."

C H A P T E R I I I

MARY HESELTINE came slowly down the hill, picking her way carefully over the narrow road—it was hardly more than footpath—which tumbled precipitately down the island to the sea. In one hand she was carrying a bunch of pink and white peonies, and in the other, with characteristic forethought, a vase to put them in. She was on her way to Juniper Cottage.

As she walked through the warm, fragrant woods her face had a rather puzzled expression. She was wondering, not for the first time, why two English people had taken it into their heads to spend the summer on Camel Island. As a resort, the island left much to be desired. It was off the beaten path; and, above all things, it was dull. The island had nothing to offer the casual tourist; only if you lived there could you appreciate the peculiar charm of its simplicity and its loneliness, and Mary thought it was rather silly of them to come there when Bar Harbour was only a few miles away. She loved the island's detachment from the rest of the world and its dark, compelling beauty, but she could not imagine why any one would spend the summer there unless they knew it intimately. The island's charm was not on the surface.

However, she was terribly glad the Chadbournes *were* coming.

She steered her way delicately over the ruts and the loose stones in her path, thinking: "I'm glad they're coming, for Linda's sake. She needs new people, instead of Laurie. She's bored with all of us, and with the life here. She doesn't know it yet, but it's creeping up on her. Possibly she ought to be in Bar Harbour, where there are more men of her own age. She's making Laurie fall in love with her because there's nothing else to do. These English people may be a welcome distraction——"

She turned a corner suddenly, and—as though her worried mind had conjured him up—she came face to face with Laurie. He was striding along the road in what was obviously a bad temper. He had a tennis racket in one hand and an old fish-net containing half a dozen balls in the other, and there was a sweater tied by the sleeves around his neck. When he caught sight of her he exclaimed without preliminaries: "Do you know where Linda is? She had a date to play tennis with me at three o'clock, and I've been waiting for her for over an hour!"

"I can't imagine where she is," replied Mrs. Heseltine vaguely. "Maybe she went . . ."

"That's the second date she's broken with me this week," announced the boy angrily, "and I'm getting fed up!"

"Oh, dear!" murmured Mrs. Heseltine, not knowing what else to say. She hesitated, and then—hoping to make him feel a little less miserable—she added: "Maybe she's gone out painting."

"But she finished painting her boat last week!"

Mrs. Heseltine shook her head. "I didn't mean *that* sort of painting . . . I mean water-colour painting; sketching."

Laurie looked both amused and incredulous. "Oh, come on!" he said. "You're kidding!"

"No, I'm not. That's probably where she is. She's been doing a lot of it lately."

Laurie frowned and said: "But why didn't she tell me something about it?" He was terribly hurt.

Mrs. Heseltine said kindly: "She hasn't told any one. I only found out by accident myself. Her grandfather asked me why she was spending so much time alone on Fiddler's Beach, and when I went after her I found her with a drawing-pad on her knees, sketching gulls."

"Is she any good at it?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Heseltine. "I haven't seen any of the sketches."

"You haven't?" said Laurie in astonishment. "Why not?"

"Well, she didn't offer to show them to me, so I didn't ask her to." She had been afraid of making Linda self-conscious about her painting. Art, where her daughter was concerned, was an excellent safety valve. When Linda was out sketching she was oblivious to everything, including Laurie, and that was all to the good. Mrs. Heseltine added: "You don't know it, but Linda's very shy about some things. I'm afraid if people make fun of her painting she'll stop, and I don't want her to do that."

She was so vehement about it that Laurie exclaimed in surprise: "Why not?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Heseltine vaguely, dodging the issue, "lots of reasons." She forestalled any further conversation with him by walking off suddenly in the direction of the sea. He watched her go with a hurt expression, his tennis racket drooping from his hand. He was sore because Linda had not confided in him herself, and bewildered because it was so unlike her to be intellectual. It was a new and disturbing side to her character, and he did not like it. He had an unreasonable feeling that she had been unfaithful to him.

Mrs. Heseltine turned another corner, and arrived at Juniper Cottage in time to meet her sister-in-law coming out of it. This was unfortunate, because Harriet was the last person she wanted to see just then. She tried to hide the bouquet she was carrying behind her back, but Harriet's eyes went up a trifle. She made no comment,

but her expression was one of surprise mingled with disapproval.

"Good-afternoon, Harriet!" said Mrs. Heseltine sweetly.

"Hallo!" replied Harriet in her peculiar voice, which was still boyish though she was long past forty. "I'm just leaving. Clarice is in there working like a beaver. There's something the matter with the pantry spigot; it won't shut off. I can't see why she bothers with it—let them fix it themselves, *I say*." She added pointedly: "And it was rather a shame, I think, to rob your garden like that. There are plenty of flowers here already. This garden is full of lupines—masses of them. You could have saved yourself the trouble."

"But we always leave flowers on people when they arrive," objected Mrs. Heseltine stubbornly. "We always have—for fifty years!"

"People we know—yes. But we don't know anything about the Chadbournes. They may be undesirables."

"The real-estate office said distinctly that they weren't."

"They *would* say that, if they wanted the commission badly enough," retorted Harriet with a shrug.

"You certainly have got it in for these people," commented Mrs. Heseltine mildly, with a grin. She was unruffled because she was reminding herself, as usual, that her sister-in-law's acidity was due to the fact that she was unmarried, bored, and lonely, and that she had once been very much in love with a man who had jilted her.

"They're not in Debrett or Burke's Peerage," added Harriet for at least the fortieth time. "I think it's a bad idea to make advances"—indicating the peonies—"until we see what they're like. I really do think, Mary, that you could have left the flowers until another day."

"But, Harriet," objected Mrs. Heseltine again, "if I'd waited until we got to know them the whole thing would have lost its point. We always give people flowers——"

"Yes, but not utter strangers."

"We've never had strangers before. Our tenants have always been our relations, or friends of the family—I think it's going to be very nice to have some new people," Mrs. Heseltine added.

"I don't. This place is much too small to have people here we don't like. It would have been so much better if Clarice had rented the cottage to Father's friend, Professor Myles. I think Father is quite peeved about it, and I told Clarice so just now. I think he should have been consulted. After all, it's his island."

"Is it?" said Mrs. Heseltine, meaning "not entirely."

"Clarice should have consulted all of us," added Harriet crossly.

Mrs. Heseltine said nothing further. She knew why Clarice had rented Juniper Cottage without consulting anybody. The Gaylys were desperately in need of money, and they were getting an enormous rent for that small grey cottage perched on the edge of a damp and unfriendly sea. But she had no intention of revealing that fact to Harriet, who would broadcast it all over the island.

Harriet was put out by Mrs. Heseltine's silence. She wanted someone to agree with her, and no one did. She turned away with a muffled exclamation of annoyance, and retrieved a bicycle from the blueberry bushes in front of Juniper Cottage and mounted it awkwardly.

"Good-bye, Harriet!" said Mrs. Heseltine faintly, wishing that she and Harriet could agree with each other more often. It was silly of them to get into an argument over a pair of foreigners neither of them had ever seen on a lovely June afternoon when the sea was a bright cobalt and the lupines were in bloom.

Harriet wavered uncertainly up the road and was lost around a bend; and with a sigh Mrs. Heseltine turned and went into Juniper Cottage. She found Clarice Gayly in the pantry, trying to fix a spigot which would not shut off. Clarice was very agitated because there was only a foot and a half of water in the well. "If I don't shut off this

damn' spigot they'll be out of water, and then I suppose they can break the lease."

"Why don't you send for a plumber?" said Mrs. Heseltine vaguely. She was still thinking about Harriet. The nearest plumber was five miles away by water, and Clarice reminded her of the fact. Then she caught sight of Mrs. Heseltine's bouquet, and she said with a cry: "Flowers! Oh, Mary, you *are* a Christian! No one else has brought them any. And you've brought them a vase, too!"

"Why not?" replied the other woman with a shrug. "Why shouldn't I? We've always done it. I don't see why we should stop now."

"Neither do I," said Clarice grimly. "But Harriet seems to have taken the attitude that these people are simply dreadful, just because she doesn't know anything about them. She says they aren't in Debrett! My God! As if it mattered!"

"They aren't in Burke's Peerage either," added Mrs. Heseltine with a grin.

"I didn't want to rent this cottage to perfect strangers," went on Clarice as she attacked the plumbing once more, "but what could I do? I need money. They offered me a huge rent—more than I've ever had before—and I couldn't say 'no.' Joey's firm has been in the red for months; he hasn't been able to give me any money since March. Look at my side of it! I've got three children at private schools and no money. I ask you—what else could I do?"

"Nothing. Don't be on the defensive, Clarice," Mrs. Heseltine advised her. "Harriet will ruin you if you take that line. You must tell her that it's none of her business."

"I'm in the dog house," added Mrs. Gayly. "Harriet told me so when she was here just now. She says that her father thinks he should have been consulted, because he knows several people who would have taken the house if I'd asked him about it—but then, this is the first time I've

heard that, so there may be nothing to it. Do you think I've made him mad?"

"No," said Mrs. Heseltine flatly, "I don't. I'm quite sure you haven't made him mad. That's just Harriet." After a moment's hesitation she added: "The trouble with Harriet is, she hasn't got enough to think about. She has an active mind, and that's the way it works."

"None of us have enough to think about," Mrs. Gayly told her. "We sit here all summer with no outside influences, getting more and more introspective——"

"That's not Harriet's trouble," broke in Mrs. Heseltine. "She needs a man."

"Well," said Clarice dubiously, "maybe. You haven't got a man, Mary, and yet you're the soul of charity."

"I had one once," Mrs. Heseltine reminded her. "Possibly the nicest man any woman ever had. I was extraordinarily lucky. And I have my child—I have Linda. Harriet has never had any . . . romance. That's a poor name for what I had—it was so much more than that, brief as it was. I was only married to John for five years, but it made life worth living. . . ."

Mrs. Gayly paused, wrench in hand, and gave the subject her whole attention. She said thoughtfully: "I can't imagine anything nicer than that sort of happiness. But, on the other hand, I can't imagine anything worse than being young again and capable of being desperately in love with anybody. It was hell, as I remember."

"All right—maybe it was. But you wouldn't want to go through life without it, would you?"

"No, I suppose not. . . . By the way, is Linda in love?"

"With Laurie, you mean?"

"Well, I wasn't putting it as bluntly as that."

Mrs. Heseltine said slowly: "No, she's not. At least, I don't think she is. That's the trouble. I want to get her away from him for a while—give her something else to think about."

"How are you planning to do it?"

"I don't know, really. I was hoping that maybe your tenants would be attractive, and that they would bring something new and interesting into her life. I was hoping they'd stimulate her mind. They're English, for one thing, and that may divert her."

"I could do with a little stimulation myself," said Clarice gloomily. "Joey is so worried about business, and he writes such depressing letters. I wish I could cheer him up."

"Why don't you go down to Philadelphia for a week or so? I'll look after the children for you. Go down and see Joey!"

"I can't," replied Mrs. Gayly. "I haven't got the money."

She closed the subject by going back to her plumbing.

Mrs. Heseltine filled her vase at the pantry spigot, and arranged her peonies in the green-glass vase she had brought. Her hands moved swiftly and deftly, and the result made Clarice exclaim in admiration:

"Oh, Mary, that's lovely! Put it in the living-room, on the big table. How beautiful the peonies are this year! . . ."

Through the open window of the pantry came the abundant, noisy wash of the sea curling and spilling over the rocks at the foot of the garden. Mrs. Gayly gave the refractory spigot a savage twist, thinking: "Water, water, everywhere—but here!"

C H A P T E R I V

THE island was a dark, midnight green edged with chrome-yellow rocks washed clean and shining by the open sea. With the exception of the grey boathouse at the end of the pier, no houses were visible. The only signs of life were the half-dozen small boats nodding at their moorings as

they waited for the islanders to come and take them out to sea. Fir trees, all of them identical in shape and size, marched abruptly away from the water up the hill and were lost against the brilliant sky. Scores of gulls were perched on the roof of the boathouse, indolently waiting for something to happen. There was an air of quietude, a remoteness, and a detachment from the rest of the world about the island and the wide, empty sea which was both stimulating and a little disturbing; and there was something about the eerie juxtaposition of forest and sea which reminded Edwina of Norse sagas she had read as a child, and certain passages from the *Rheingold* and *Tristan*. It was beautiful, and it was fey.

The ferry began to slow down. As the throb of the motor died they could hear the gulls screaming, and the sound of a bell. Edwina thought at first that it was a church bell, and then she realized that she was listening to a buoy rung by the gentle, monotonous hand of the tide. It was a sweet sound but a rather mournful one if you listened to it long enough. Ever afterward, when she heard the sound of a bell buoy, Edwina remembered her first sight of the island: the little grey pier with the lobster cars riding beside it, the cool blue sky, and the beautiful, formal trees marching stiffly away from the water up the hill, and from the other side of the island the restless pound and thunder of the open sea.

Nicholas came around the corner of the pilot house.
“ Well, we’re here!” he said ineptly.

“ Beautiful, isn’t it?” she murmured.

Nicholas had something on his mind. “ Have we a guilty look about us?” he asked suddenly.

“ Not after ten years,” she told him reassuringly.

“ I always feel like this—as though it were written all over me—when I come to a new place. . . . After a while I forget it entirely.”

“ Forget it now,” she advised him. “ Your face is very expressive. Just put the whole thing out of your mind, darling. We’ll muddle through this somehow.”

Linda was out of earshot doing something with the mooring ropes. Nicholas nodded towards her. "It's the young who make me really nervous, when they're still so young that they haven't acquired any philosophy about human behaviour. What do you suppose she'd think if I went up to her now and told her?"

"I don't know," replied Edwina briefly. She changed the subject with a swiftness born of long practice. "Look at those fir trees, Nick! Aren't they amazing? They're all different editions of the same tree. And look at the colour of the shadows under the boughs—it's midnight blue. They'll be wonderful to paint."

Nicholas said nothing. He reached for her hand and held it for a moment in silence. What could he say? What was there to say? Words were clumsy, inept, and almost vulgar, in the face of Edwina's courage. As usual her selflessness put him to shame. He thought unhappily: "I'm not worth all this devotion!" And he dropped her hand as if to release her from bondage and himself from responsibility.

The ferry subsided gently against the dock, gave a final choke, and was silent. In the bow, Linda hurled a mooring rope shoreward with an expert flip of the wrist which landed it neatly coiled over a post. Then she clambered rapidly after it and made it fast. She caught Nicholas's eye upon her, and his startled expression made her wonder if she wasn't getting a bit too old for this sort of thing. Wasn't it a bit undignified of her to play cabin boy in these days? Ordinarily when the islanders were on board the ferry it seemed quite natural, but this strange Englishman's expression made her feel decidedly uncomfortable. She could feel a hot tide of colour rushing over her cheeks. Mr. Chadbourne's eyes were deep wells of conjecture and approval. For the first time that day she realized that her costume *might* leave something to be desired. It was sketchy to say the least, and she wondered whether by any horrible chance Mr. Chadbourne had guessed that she had

nothing on underneath her playsuit but a pair of cotton drawers purchased at the five and ten in Rockland.

Nicholas was thinking, as he watched the grace with which she was hurling ropes up on the dock: "It's just as well that I'm getting on in life or I would be tremendously excited by the flowing motion of her arms and legs and by the warm honey colour of her skin. But as it is I can't say that I even want to paint them. I wonder why she leaves me so completely cold? I suppose it's because she's so different from English girls. She's so terribly in command of herself. And she looks hard. She has none of the dewy freshness of the girls at home—which is of course a howling bore in the girls at home but over here I find I miss it. I can remember Edwina at that age. She was hard, too, but in an entirely different way. She had a rod of steel up her spine but fortunately it wasn't apparent. At twenty Edwina gave you a melting feeling in spite of her strong-mindedness."

All this flashed through his mind in the space of a second, but it was long enough so that Linda half-guessed what he was thinking. She felt gauche and uncomfortable, and she reminded herself hotly in an effort to bolster up her self-respect that it didn't matter in the least what Mr. Chadbourne thought. He was only a stranger, someone she had known a scant hour, an Englishman who had nothing to do with the island or with her. Added to that, Mrs. Chadbourne was infinitely more attractive. She was nice, she was kind, and she didn't look at you in strange ways, sizing you up. . . .

Captain Angel issued from the pilot house. "Well," he said briefly, "here we are!"

Nicholas looked at him dryly. "What do we do with the luggage now?" he asked. "Do we find another wheelbarrow?"

"No. The buckboard will be here in a minute. I hear it comin' through the woods now. Sam will take your stuff over on that. You don't have to worry about nothin' any more for a while. Come a long way, ain't you?"

"Yes," said Nicholas shortly.

"Can't see why you came here," added the older man simply. "What sort of a place did you think it was, anyway? You people ought to have gone to Bar Harbour. There's plenty doin' up there. Here, it's as dull as bilge water. It's all right if you're used to it, but I wouldn't choose it otherwise."

Linda interrupted him to say: "Here comes the buck-board, and Mrs. Gayly."

A long, low cart issued from the woods, bumping and rocking over the uneven roadbed. It drew up beside the grey shack, and Mrs. Gayly jumped out of it. Linda grew even more depressed and self-conscious. Her Cousin Clarice looked, if anything, more untidy than she did herself. What would they think of the island, these people who were fresh from the excitements of the Riviera, the Tyrol, the Rue de la Paix, and all the other gaudy places where—according to their luggage—they spent most of their time? Viewed objectively, with herself and Mrs. Gayly as an example, the islanders must seem both dowdy and suburban. It was unfortunate that Cousin Clarice had appeared at just that moment, wearing those clothes and that flustered expression, with her hair wandering out from under the brim of her hat. The hat was a battered, cheap panama which had seen service indiscriminately through rain and shine for more years than Mrs. Gayly or anybody else could remember—the hat was a familiar landmark on the island—and Linda's heart flinched at the sight of it. Also, Cousin Clarice's hair was sadly in need of a permanent. Mrs. Gayly was a Daughter of the Cincinnati, a Regent of the D.A.R., a patroness of the Philadelphia Assembles, and a great deal more. But of course the Chadbournes wouldn't know that. She looked, unfortunately, like a poor relation.

"Hallo, Linda!" she exclaimed cheerfully, giving her hat a jab in the wrong direction. "What are you doing here?"

Without waiting for a reply she barged down upon the

ferry, cheerfully expecting the worst and grimly determined to make the best of it. Captain Angel tossed her a look which spoke volumes, but Mrs. Gayly was too flustered to get the full import of what he was trying to convey, which was in essence: "This'll be a good joke on your Cousin Harriet."

Mrs. Gayly peered into the ferry.

"How do you do?" said Nicholas courteously, removing his hat. "This is Mrs. Gayly, is it not?" He was quite unconscious of the tumult of relief he was causing in his landlady's bosom. His only thought was: "She's giving us the once-over, sizing us up. Wondering if we'll do. We won't, of course, but she doesn't know that yet."

"Well, well, here you are!" stammered Mrs. Gayly. She was incoherent with relief. She looked at Edwina and blushed awkwardly with emotion. These people were gentlefolk, the sort of people one knew!

"Oh, heavens!" thought Edwina. "She looks so terribly respectable! Her hat is the kind that Effie Singleton, the vicar's wife, used to wear at home. And her clothes haven't an atom of style. I didn't know that American women ever looked like that—they're usually so frightfully smart."

Mrs. Gayly noticed the pile of luggage in the ferry, and she advised her tenants to disembark at once and let Sam attend to it. As she preceded them down the wharf she thought to herself that this was no casual summer journey; these people seemed to travel with all their personal effects. The labels on the luggage advertised the fact that her tenants were very widely travelled. "But why in the devil did they come here?" she wondered.

The Chadbournes' personal belongings were removed from the ferry and piled into the buckboard, where they looked oddly sophisticated and slightly out of place. Edwina said to Linda: "What do we do now—climb aboard also?"

"I wouldn't advise it," replied the younger girl. "The road's rough. And besides that, it's hard on Lion. He's

getting old and he can't pull the buckboard as well as he used to."

"Are there no automobiles?"

"No. Grandfather doesn't approve of them. We're living fifty years behind the times, but Grandfather says it's restful, and what he says goes."

"Have we very far to walk?" added the Englishwoman nervously. She was woefully tired.

"No, it isn't very far. Just over the hill. . . ." Linda added shyly: "I hope you'll like the island. It's not very comfortable, but it's lots of fun, really! It gets you after a while."

She loved the island, but she knew it might frighten someone who had not yet had time to succumb to its charm. It was nicer than Bar Harbour. Really more entertaining. But you had to live there to find that out. In a few weeks Mrs. Chadbourne would like it better than she did now. All of the excitement was underneath. It was an excitement of the spirit rather than of the mind or the body. The sea, the forest, the rocky, sequestered beaches, the weather-beaten, homely houses, the smell of it, the feel of it, the colour of it! Wonderful and exciting and frightening and thrilling and beautiful, on days of storm or in a dead calm, by night or by day, in rain or shine. . . . But you wouldn't know that all at once. . . .

Edwina replied: "I shall like being at the edge of the sea. I've never had enough of it. And I shan't mind the discomfort. I'm used to it." She could not tell the girl that as long as Nicholas was happy here, nothing else mattered.

"Well, good-bye!" said Linda, picking her bicycle out of the long grass beside the road where she had dropped it earlier that afternoon. "I go one way and you go the other. I'll be seeing you!"

She mounted the bicycle, throwing her leg over the saddle with the grace of a ballet dancer at the bar, and was off down the road before Edwina could tell her how much she had enjoyed meeting her. At the bend of the road,

before she was lost to sight among the fir trees, she turned and waved.

Nicholas was standing beside the buckboard, and he waved back uncertainly.

C H A P T E R V

THE road wandered darkly through the evergreens, climbed a slight rise, and then sloped down again towards the sea. Edwina could hear the water long before she could see it; there was the alternate surge and crash of the waves and the sound of a bell. Overhead the trees sighed and whispered sibilantly in the light wind which had sprung up with the end of the afternoon, and from a distance came the put-put of a lobster boat going home to Port Hard. Mrs. Gayly walked ahead of her tenants, leading the way, with Edwina following and Nicholas bringing up the rear, in a desultory fashion. Mrs. Gayly apologized profusely for the state of the road, which, like every other road on the island, was full of stones and crab grass and mussel shells left there by the gulls. "Cousin Jim won't fix it," she explained. "We're living fifty years behind the times. It's so silly. He won't allow us to have automobiles on the island, and he won't mend the roadbed so that we can ride our bicycles comfortably."

"That's what Miss Heseltine said," remarked Edwina; adding spontaneously, "she's very sweet, isn't she? She was very kind in Port Hard; she found a barrow and moved all of our luggage down to the ferry."

"Very sweet!" echoed Nicholas.

Mrs. Gayly considered this remark for a moment before replying. The adjective "sweet" was almost never applied to Linda, who had long since outgrown it. Linda reminded her of Atalanta—the girl who ran with the apples—and Ginger Rogers, with a dash of Scarlett O'Hara. The term "sweet" confused her somewhat. "Yes," she compromised finally, "she's very nice."

Nicholas went on, raising his quiet English voice above that of the forest: "She was very discouraging about the island—she was quite sure we wouldn't like it."

Mrs. Gayly was quite sure they wouldn't like it either, but she made no comment. Edwina said with a laugh: "She seemed to think we were very sophisticated, but we're not, really."

Mrs. Gayly changed the subject. "I hope you'll be happy in Juniper Cottage. I love it myself because I spent my honeymoon there. It's not very up-to-date, but it has charm. The paint is chipping off the tub, but I can't help that—it chips as soon as it's painted. And there's something the matter with the pantry spigot—it won't shut off. You'll have to be careful with it or you'll run out of water. I tried to fix it this afternoon but I don't think I did a very good job on it. I'm not much of a plumber. I'll send for a man from Port Hard to-morrow. The well," she added nervously, "sometimes goes dry in August."

Edwina was not paying much attention to her. The path came out of the woods suddenly, and below them lay the sea. The old grey cottage with its white trim was perched on the top of a cliff like a cat basking in the sunshine. At its feet lay the garden. The lupines were at their height, and it seemed to Edwina as though the half-wild garden had drained the sky and the sea of colour and reduced them to the essential blue. It was so dramatic, and so lovely, that Edwina stopped with a gasp: "Nicholas!"

Nicholas came and stood beside her and looked down at the mass of colour between himself and the water. The rocks at the edge of the sea were every conceivable shade of yellow and grey touched here and there with the peculiar reddish green of the seaweeds which had been washed up by the tide. The water which eddied around them was so clear that he could see the pebbles on the ocean floor.

His eye wandered back to the flowers, helplessly.

That dramatic, vital patch of perennials was the sort of thing that an amateur would tackle confidently, thinking that a few splotches of blue would do the trick. But there

were a thousand blues in that mass of colour, all of them elusive. It would take someone like Monet, no less, to put that amazing combination of warm sunlight and cold colour on to a canvas. It was so beautiful—a hackneyed word, but that was what it was—so beautiful that it almost sickened him. Because he knew without trying what he would get out of it—a “ pretty picture ” of lupines on a hill. His impulse was to throw his paintbox into the sea and go and shut himself up in the house.

Edwina nudged him. “ Did you *ever* see such a blue? It’s powdered lapis! ”

Mrs. Gayly, who had seen the lupines in bloom for all of forty-five summers, wondered a little why they were so excited over them. Her tenants hadn’t even glanced at the house. They were looking at the garden and at each other, and they had forgotten her entirely. Mrs. Chadbournes’ face now had some colour in it, and her eyes were brighter. “ Oh, darling! ” she was saying to her husband, “ I’m so glad we came here—aren’t you? And to think of the places we might have gone! ”

Mrs. Gayly wondered dryly how she would feel when the roof began to leak. But then, the hard rains never came until September, and she doubted very much if the Chadbournes would stay on the island that long. “ I give them six weeks, ” she said to herself; and for some reason she felt slightly depressed.

Edwina’s depression, on the other hand, had evaporated suddenly. Never in her most optimistic moments had she pictured anything like this garden tumbling into the sea. On the left, rising abruptly from the Atlantic, were more islands, and miles beyond them the dark glimmer of the mainland down east. The lobster boat which had once been only a sound was now an actuality; behind it flowed two smaller boats painted shrimp pink.

It was all so new and so vital and so haunting—this dark green island with its yellow rocks and bright blue set—that it seemed unreal. The Côte d’Azur seemed nearer

with its tawdry hotels and dusty palm trees and untidy beaches.

But Nicholas couldn't paint the Côte d'Azur—not any more. His paintings of that rather fusty playground had degenerated into spiritless little water colours without style or form. He needed the vitality, the novelty, and the stimulation of something quite new. And God, for some reason, had provided it just when he needed it most.

Mrs. Gayly was walking up the path towards the house. Edwina roused herself with an effort and followed her. The cottage had five rooms; kitchen and living-room downstairs, and three bedrooms and the tin bathtub upstairs. There was a slightly salty odour about the house as though the sea and the fog had claimed it permanently for a residence, and there were splotches of damp on the walls. Mrs. Gayly apologized nervously for the signs of damp everywhere; but Edwina, who had been brought up in a foggy climate, gave them only a passing glance. Her eyes were still full of the garden and the sea, and the only thing in the house which interested her was a vase of peonies on the big table in the centre of the room.

"How very kind of you!" she exclaimed to Mrs. Gayly.

"How sweet of you to think of giving me flowers!"

"I didn't," replied Mrs. Gayly quickly. "Those came from Mrs. Heseltine, Linda's mother. The vase, incidentally, belongs to her."

"How kind!" said Edwina again, absently. She stared at the peonies in silence, visualizing the garden at Prince Setton, smelling the rain on curly white petals, hearing Nicholas's voice saying, "Edwina! . . . Edwina! I'd like to pick those for you, but I'm afraid Gertrude would object—she's saving them for a flower show. . . ."

CHAPTER VI

DUSK was falling over the coast. The sky, once so vivid a blue, had now turned to a deep watermelon pink behind the Camden Hills. A few lights had begun to glimmer here and there on the mainland, clustered in bunches wherever there was a harbour, or glowing like isolated stars in lonely farmhouses. They shone indistinctly as yet in the half dark. Suddenly the lighthouse at Port Hard beamed out like an enormous planet, announcing the arrival of evening.

Captain Angel was visiting his lobster pots. He rowed softly along the twilit island, ruffling the opalescent water with his oars. The water looked like very expensive coloured glass, and he left dimples behind him at intervals, destroying its perfection. From time to time he would stop, pull up a lobster pot, stare at it for a moment, remove the lobsters if any, bait it, and drop it back again into the glassy ocean with a loud splash.

On shore, the horse Lion had retired permanently for the night. They had given him his oats, and his grey duvetyn nose was buried deep in the manger. His teeth worked softly and monotonously, crunching the oats into fragments as his tail moved lazily back and forth, switching off imaginary flies which were no longer there.

Sam wandered forth upon the dock and sat down, hanging his enormous feet over the pearly water. He took a hand line, complete with hooks and sinkers, and a tobacco tin full of clams, out of his pocket, baited his hook, and dropped it into the water. He was fishing for pollock. At least, that was what he said he was doing. Actually he had come out into the quiet evening to meditate. He let his mind slip out across the water like a boat released from its moorings, past the lobster pots, the little sailing dinghies, the bell buoy, past all permanent fixtures of his life. He sat there, like a Yogi, completely disembodied. . . .

For these three—the ferry captain, the horse, and the

man of all work—the day was nearly over. But in the large house at the top of the hill it was only just beginning. It lacked fifteen minutes of the cocktail hour at Mr. Heseltine senior's. Through the open windows came the sound of an ice pick, bath water running out, and the faint whine of classical music played on a radio. Linda felt a quixotic desire to look in a window and see what they were doing before they knew she was there. So she went around the side of the house and looked in the dining-room window. The square golden-oak table, relic of the early nineties, was set for four people. "Company to dinner," she thought; "I wonder who?" Her grandfather was in the living-room; she could see the top of his head gleaming like a silver patch in the dusky room. He was listening to the radio; the strains of *Scheherazade* floated seductively out into the quiet evening. In a moment Harriet would come and destroy the repose which seemed to fill the room. Oil lamps would be lit, the glowing coals in the fireplace would be obliterated by new logs, the radio would be switched off. Other people would come straggling in: her Uncle Farr, her mother, Cousin Clarice, young Joey, Patricia, her Aunt Maribel . . . and possibly Laurie. The cocktail hour was an event—frequently the only event of the day—on Camel Island. The younger members of the family sat around and drank pineapple juice, and their elders drank rye. Linda had joined the rye drinkers last year; at the moment she felt the distinct need for a cocktail, but there was something else she wanted before that. She had come up the hill purposely fifteen minutes ahead of every one else to have a word in private with her grandfather. She had discovered by looking in the dining-room window that he was having company for dinner; that meant that she must talk to him now or not at all that day. And she must get him out of the house quickly, before Harriet came and destroyed all privacy.

"Hallo!" she said softly through the open window.
"Hi, there!"

"Who's that?" he replied, lifting his head. Patricia?"

"No. It's me—Linda!"

"Hallo, ducky!" he exclaimed, turning his head.
"What are you doing there, at the window? Won't you come in?"

"No, not yet. I want to talk to you. Can you come out to the garden for a minute, before the rest of them arrive? Please, Grandpa!"

Her voice was urgent, unusually so. He wondered what sort of trouble his little duck was in now. Curiosity got the better of his indolence, and he decided to go and see. "Very well," he replied. "I'll meet you out there in one minute."

Linda continued around the house, passing the kitchen window on the way. Through it came the aromatic fragrance of lobster thermidor mingled with the crisp, hot, buttery smell of popovers. Her Aunt Harriet was in the pantry chopping ice with boyish vigour, scattering fragments of it around her angular person the way a canary scatters seed. On the dresser was a plate full of appetizers made of lobster coral. Linda skirted the corner of the house and came out into the garden. There was no one there yet. In the half-light the peonies gleamed like miniature moons, and the lupines were dark racemes of midnight blue. There was a fragrance also of something else, a plant which she could not name, some flower which was extraordinarily sweet. As usual, in this quiet garden overlooking the sea whenever she happened to be in it at the verge of evening, she was afflicted with a sense of something which she did not understand, a feeling of beauty, perhaps, only remotely comprehended, a glimmering of knowledge which, as yet, had been withheld from her. . . . Colour and form were tangible things; in the daytime the garden was composed of a thousand shades of pink and blue and green and white and violet, and known shapes—racemes and globes and stars and cups; flowers one could see and smell and touch and paint. But with the twilight all that changed. Drained of colour the garden became illusory; when night came form vanished and something equally beautiful, but unpaintable, took its place. . . .

She looked up quickly. Her grandfather was coming towards her from the house, moving slowly, majestically, like a ship in full sail. He had thrown a tattered Paisley shawl which had been in the family for two generations over his broad shoulders, and he was using a blackthorn cane which he had once purchased in Queenstown, Ireland. His hair and his short, pointed beard gleamed in the dusk like newly minted silver. As usual he turned his massive head and looked out to sea; the action was subconscious, born of long years of habit. Linda wondered what, if anything, he expected to find there just now. He moved into the garden and she noticed in surprise that the delphiniums were as high as his shoulder, and one or two venerable ones actually towered over his head. . . . And he was a tall man.

"Well?" he said, looking at her closely through the dusk. "What's up?"

"I just wanted to talk to you for a minute before the rest came," she said quickly. "I went to Port Hard this afternoon, and . . ."

"Yes—go on!" He added dryly: "Laurie was here, asking where you were. Evidently you had promised to play tennis with him."

"I had, but I forgot. I was going past the dock just as Angel Face was leaving for Port Hard. I asked him why he was going over at that hour and he said that he was going to meet the Chadbournes. . . ."

"Chadbournes?"

"The English people. Cousin Clarice's tenants. You know."

"Yes, I know. They were coming to-day, weren't they?"

"Yes. . . ."

"And?"

"I just wanted to tell you about them."

"You came back in the ferry with them, did you?"

"Yes."

"I am interested to hear what they are like. New-comers to the island are always exciting."

She could see that her grandfather had completely missed the point. That was the wonderful thing about him; the gossip of the island passed over his head like a swarm of locusts, buzzing for a moment, and then leaving him completely unconcerned. She could see now that his mind was more on the garden around him than on the Chadbournes. But she wanted his attention.

"Yes," she said, "they *were* exciting. I thought they were swell!"

"Did you?" he said politely, knocking off a dead peony with his cane. "That's nice."

"She—she's absolutely beautiful, Grandpa! You'd think she was divine."

"Would I?" mildly. "What about him?"

Linda thought a moment. "Well . . . he's nice, too. I can't explain him. I've never known any one quite like him."

"Is he good-looking, too?"

"I wouldn't say that he was . . . no, I don't think so. He's very English, of course . . . he's hard to get at." She did not tell him that she was afraid that Mr. Chadbourne did not like her very much. She added vaguely: "But I suppose that's reserve—the English are supposed to be like that until you get to know them."

They heard a screen door slam, and then another and another. People were arriving for cocktails. And she had not yet said what she had come to say. "Listen, Grandpa!" she exclaimed, moving nearer to him and looking up into his face, "I think they're awfully attractive."

Her voice held a note of anxiety in it. He said slowly: "Why are you concerned over them, my dear? Has someone been rude to them—is that the trouble?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. I just wanted you to be good to them because I think they're unhappy. Maybe they're homesick. At any rate, I thought you ought to know that they're very nice."

"And who thinks they aren't?" he asked her, picking a rose-coloured *Bellis perennis* and fixing it in his button-hole.

"Nobody's seen them except Cousin Clarice. I don't think anybody wants to very much. You know what we're all like! We're——"

"Insular," supplied the *doyen* of the island. "Harriet, as I remember, did not approve."

"That's just it. . .!"

"I see what you're driving at. . . ."

The conversation died momentarily. From the house came sounds of merriment and the faint but unmistakable rattle of a cocktail shaker. More people came up the hill and the door slammed again three times. The house was getting quite full.

"Well," said the old man, "we must go in. What do you want me to do?"

"You could send flowers," said Linda quickly. "I'm quite sure Aunt Harriet won't."

"Very well. But who's going to pick them at this hour of night? Will to-morrow do?"

"No, it won't. I'll pick them if you don't mind."

"I don't mind as long as you don't pick too many. Peonies . . . those would be nice . . . and a few lupines . . . and one or two lilies." His cane moved from side to side in the dusk, indicating each plant.

"Thanks," said Linda briefly. "I'll pick them after I've had a cocktail. If I stay out here now everybody will wonder where I am and take it for granted I'm out with Laurie."

Mr. Heseltine was half-way out of the garden, but he turned back for a moment, and looked at his granddaughter speculatively. "Laurie!" he exclaimed meditatively. "What are you going to do with that boy?"

"Do with him? I don't know. Why?"

"He's in love with you. But you know that, I suppose?"

"So I'm told," said Linda dryly, "by every one."

"And are *you* in love with him?"

"I don't think so, Grandpa."

"You've kissed him, I suppose?"

Linda admitted the fact. Mr. Heseltine added: "That, of course, has nothing to do with being in love."

"No, Grandpa."

"Very well. If you understand *that*, that's something."

A look passed between them. Mr. Heseltine smiled indulgently. Neither of them was especially affectionate. Otherwise, they might have kissed because they were very fond of each other. With a chuckle the grandfather turned and went up the slight rise to the house. Linda followed in his wake, gratefully.

Mr. Heseltine senior's house had been built in the summer of '86. However, it lacked the gingerbread, the mansard roofs, and the stained-glass portholes fashionable that summer. It was of no recognizable period or design. The house was perched on top of the big hill—"The Hump" as it was called when any one remembered to give the hill a name—and the view from the porch was quite spectacular. On clear days you could see as far as Mount Desert in one direction and Squirrel Island in the other, taking in Monhegan on the way. This was the only house on the island which annually received a coat of paint, colour depending upon the whim of the owner. At the moment the house was a pale butter yellow with a white porch. The rooms inside were large and comfortable and furnished with an odd mixture of eighteenth-century mahogany, late Victorian golden oak, and modern Grand Rapids. The living-room walls were crowded with mediocre water colours of the coast of Maine, family photographs, and some very fine copperplate engravings. There were a great many books strewn about on the tables and chairs, and the titles ranged from *Diddie, Dumps and Tot*, to *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*. A mahogany canterbury at the end of the sofa was crammed with magazines and newspapers and seed catalogues. During the last few minutes

the windows had been closed against the damp air which was creeping upward from the sea, and flowered chintz curtains had been pulled across them, giving the large, untidy room a shut-in, cosy air. Harriet was pouring cocktails, and a small boy in blue denim overalls was passing the appetizers.

The babble of voices was deafening, and the air was already getting thick with tobacco smoke. The fire had been replenished, and the dying embers had broken out once more into a healthy flame. Four children of assorted ages were grouped in front of the fire-screen hopefully waiting for the blaze to subside again so that they could toast marshmallows. A black spaniel named Little Eva was wandering in and out among the rye drinkers, silently begging for appetizers. The spaniel belonged to Julie Channing, Laurie's mother. Mrs. Channing was the only person in the room at that moment who was not a Heseltine by birth or by marriage. Harriet was saying to her: "I went over there and found Clarice with a wrench, trying to fix the pantry spigot. I said to her: 'I don't see why you go to all this trouble. Let them fix it themselves.' But Clarice didn't see it that way. Clarice is either a fool or a saint. I haven't made up my mind which."

The front door opened, and Mr. Heseltine moved into the room. "Harriet, my dear!" he exclaimed without preliminaries, "give me a drink at once. The night air is extremely bad for me. I am chilled to the bone."

Everybody roared with laughter, because Harriet disapproved of the way he drank. She said: "What were you doing out there anyway?"

"I was having an assignation with a charming young woman."

"Not Mrs. Chadbourne, I hope!" said Julie wickedly.

"No, I have not yet had that pleasure."

Somebody put in dryly: "Is it a pleasure?" and Linda appeared suddenly from nowhere.

"Yes," she replied firmly, "it is."

Her Aunt Harriet looked at her with surprise mingled

with distrust. "How do you know?" she asked bluntly.

"Because I *have* had the pleasure," replied the girl. "May I have a cocktail, please? The night air was bad for my sinus." There was a low murmur of warning from the other side of the room where Linda's mother was sitting. Linda ignored it, however. She was highly annoyed.

"And how," asked Harriet, "did you meet these people?"

"They came back on the ferry with me from Port Hard," Linda told her.

"So—you went to Port Hard?"

"Anything doing over there?" put in young Joey Gayly, quite unconscious of the passage-at-arms which was going on between his two cousins. "Did you find out anything about the soft ball game on Saturday?"

Before Linda could answer him her aunt hopped with the remark: "You realize, I suppose, that you had a date with Laurie this afternoon? He was up here looking for you."

"I realize it now, but at the time I forgot it," said Linda, which was partly true. She *had* forgotten him until the ferry was too far away from the dock to do anything about it. "By the way, where is he?"

"He stayed home in a temper," said Harriet promptly.

This wasn't quite true either. Julie Channing's voice rose in defence of her missing son. "Oh, no, he didn't, Linda! I sent him over to Juniper Cottage with some flowers. That's why he's late."

"Was he mad?" Linda asked her.

"No, not really. He was upset because you didn't tell him where you were going. He thought perhaps you'd gone out in your boat, and he had an idea that you'd drowned or something."

"I don't like that boat of hers either!" put in Mrs. Heseltine vehemently, her voice rising above the hubbub.

"I think it's too fast and it hasn't got enough beam. It makes me very nervous, Linda, I do wish you'd stop going out in it alone!"

Before Linda could object to these uncomplimentary statements about her boat, Harriet returned to the first subject with her usual tenacity and said loudly: "So you gave the Chadournes some flowers, Julie? Mary brought them some peonies this afternoon, and I told her it was a bad idea. I don't think we ought to make advances to them until we find out what they're like——"

Her father ploughed under her voice ruthlessly, saying loudly and firmly: "Nothing can happen to Linda in that boat if she keeps her head and pays attention to what she's doing. The sloop's a bit narrow in the beam, of course, but the *Astra* wasn't any wider in the beam than that, as I remember, and nobody ever came to grief in it. It is merely a question of keeping one's head. Harriet! I'll have a dividend, please! Shake them up."

Harriet obediently poured more rye into the shaker, saying meanwhile: "Clarice won't tell me anything about her tenants. All she'll say is: 'Wait and see for yourself.' "

Clarice Gayly was absorbed in her knitting, so the remark passed unnoticed. Harriet added: "I can't see why she's so mysterious about them. It makes me inclined to expect the worst."

"Now, now!" protested the old man mildly. "Have another cocktail, Harriet, and you'll feel better. I'm quite sure, from what I hear, that Mr. and Mrs. Chadbourne are delightful people. Why not give them the benefit of the doubt this evening, anyway?"

Linda came up behind him and put her hands on his shoulders. A warm, vital current of humour passed between them. He was charmed by the soft pressure of her hands, for his little duck was almost never demonstrative. Something had got into her that day. He wondered what it was. Laurie?

No, he thought, not Laurie.

It was possible that her sketching was making her more human.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Linda reached home her mother asked her placidly where she had been and why she was late for supper. She replied that she had been to Juniper Cottage with some flowers from the Big House.

"Not from Harriet!" exclaimed Mrs. Heseltine with a startled laugh.

"No," said Linda, "Grandpa sent them." She did not add—at her suggestion.

Mrs. Heseltine said then: "Laurie was here, asking for you."

"What! again?" exclaimed Linda, cheerfully unconcerned.

Her mother told her that he had come to the house only five minutes ago, and not finding her had gone off again into the night. "After supper I'll go and hunt him up," replied Linda easily, sitting down at the table.

Her mother thought a minute; and then she said dryly: "Don't you think that perhaps you're taking him just a teeny, weeny, little bit for granted? How do you know you'll be able to find him?"

"The island isn't very large," Linda reminded her amiably. "He can't have gone many places."

"I didn't mean that," murmured Mrs. Heseltine. After a while she added quietly: "I'd go slow there, Linda, if I were you! . . . I don't think you're being quite fair."

"Because I broke a date with him?"

"No. As a matter of fact, I'm rather glad you did break that date with him this afternoon. What I meant was, I think you've been leading him on a bit."

Linda thoughtfully cracked her lobster claw before she spoke. As she picked the meat out of it she said: "I hadn't looked at it that way. He started it. He's mad for me."

"Yes, I'm afraid so. But you're not in love with him, are you?"

"No. But I've told him that," she added defensively.

"I've been perfectly honest with him all along. He knows I'm not in love with him, but it doesn't seem to bother him much."

"Has he said anything to you about—marriage?" asked Mrs. Heseltine nervously, feeling self-consciously Victorian.

"Only in the abstract," the girl told her.

Mrs. Heseltine felt that, having gone that far, she might as well go a little farther. "What are you going to say to him when he *does* ask you to marry him?"

"You mean, are my intentions honourable?"

"Yes, my dear!"

Linda frowned. She did not reply at once, but let her eyes wander over to the open window, where they became fixed upon the evening star. Her mind, however, kept wandering. Finally she said cautiously: "I don't think so. I don't think I'd ever want to marry him. Not even if I was in love with him. . . . You see, there's something else I want. . . ."

"Another boy?"

"No." After a moment she added in a subdued voice: "You know what it is. You saw me there, that day on the beach. You know what I was doing."

"Is that what you want, more than anything?"

"I think so. . . ."

The "girl" came in with a platter of asparagus, and they helped themselves in silence. When she had gone Mrs. Heseltine said, hunting cautiously around in her own mind for the proper expression of her sentiments: "Are you willing to give up practically everything for it? Well, I mean—are you willing to give up a home and children and all that sort of thing?"

"By 'that sort of thing,' I suppose, you mean sex?"

"I wasn't putting it as crudely as that," Mrs. Heseltine told her, "but now that you've expressed my sentiments

so nicely, I might as well go into it with you. Quite frankly, I'd rather have you paint pictures than marry Laurie. But that's only because I think you're too young to marry anybody. On the other hand, I'm not at all sure that you'd be happy if you weren't married some time."

"Sex again, I suppose, rearing its ugly head?"

"It's rather important."

"And you think I can't live without it?"

"I don't know. We'll see."

"In other words, you'd rather I couldn't live without it. Because you don't want me to turn out like Aunt Harriet. Frustrated. Bitter. Inhibited. Cross."

Mrs. Heseltine would not say what she thought on that subject. She said firmly: "I'm afraid that if you get married—to anybody—that you'll wake up in about five years and discover that you've married the wrong man. You're still growing up, Linda. You haven't stopped yet. Just now you're a split personality—"

"Schizophrenic," supplied Linda.

"One half of you wants to get married, and the other half wants the artistic life. In five years, possibly, you'll know where you are."

"I don't see why I couldn't find a man who'd combine both," Linda told her. "There must be one around, somewhere."

"Yes, but not here," said Mrs. Heseltine meaningfully.

"No," agreed Linda without argument, "Laurie's not what you might call intellectual. But there are other things about him I adore. That's the trouble."

"Laurie," added Mrs. Heseltine with conviction, "would make a wonderful husband for most girls, but I'm just wondering if he's quite the thing for you. Don't lose your head."

Linda assured her that she would not lose her head, and rising from the table she sauntered over to the open window. From where she stood she could see the lights of Juniper Cottage gleaming far away down the hill at the

edge of the sea. She murmured: "I can't make the Chadbournes out!"

"I meant to ask you what you thought of them!" exclaimed her mother, rising and blowing out the candles on the supper table. "What are they like?"

"I don't know. I can't make them out at all."

Mrs. Heseltine asked her hopefully if they were "nice." By that she meant quite simply: "How would you place them socially?"

Linda replied briefly that if they weren't in Debrett they ought to be.

"Harriet will be disappointed," commented her mother with a twinkle.

"Cousin Clarice was pretty funny," added Linda. "She hadn't expected anything quite so—glamorous. She came down to meet them in that old hat."

"So the Chadbournes are 'glamorous,' are they?"

"Yes, rather. *She* is absolutely beautiful. Her clothes are divine."

"Young?"

"No. About thirty-five, I'd say."

"Did you find out why they came here?"

"No. And I've got a vague idea that I never will." Warming to her subject, Linda added: "I never saw so much luggage on the ferry in my life! It was crammed to the gunwales. They had dozens of crates and cartons and duffle bags and suitcases, and the suitcases were simply plastered with labels. They've been everywhere."

"Then why in the world did they come here?"

Linda gave a shrug. "Beats me!"

"What's Mr. Chadbourne like?" inquired her mother.

"Oh, rather strange! I couldn't seem to get anywhere with him. Like most of the British he's terribly reserved and quiet. But there's something else about him—I don't know! He's got something on his mind."

"Are you sure?" said Mrs. Heseltine with a mild protest. "Aren't you rather imagining things?"

"No. You wait and see! There's something peculiar about them."

"For heaven's sake, don't tell Harriet that or the poor Chadbournes will have a miserable time of it."

"I won't. But, anyway, I don't think she'll know that there *is* something slightly strange about them. She'll be so overcome by their glamour that she won't look any farther. They are very *hauptgebornen!*" she added meaningly.

Mrs. Heseltine scowled at Linda's allusion to her aunt's snobbishness. She said to her firmly: "You'll have a real fight with Harriet some of these days if you aren't careful! You're spoiling for it now. I don't approve of your attitude towards her. You might be a little bit more tolerant."

"Just because she was crossed in love?"

"That's putting it very crudely!"

"Sex, again, rearing its ugly head. . . ."

"Don't be flippant, my dear! I'd wait, if I were you, until some man hurt me brutally, before I felt qualified to judge your Aunt Harriet."

"I wouldn't let any man get that far!"

"Now you're being both arrogant and stupid. She was in love with him, and you'll find when you're in love that there are lots of things over which you have no control. Common sense evaporates. . . ."

"I can't imagine her ever being in love. She's always reminded me of a resentful choirboy."

"She was very much in love."

"And the man?"

"That is something we have never been able to find out. He seemed to be genuinely in love with her, but he left her suddenly one day and never came back. It was all very dramatic," added Mrs. Heseltine with a rueful expression, the incident still vivid in her mind. "He had a schooner called the *Black Watch*. He used to keep the boat moored within sight of the Big House so that Harriet could wave good-night to him—he lived on board. One morning she

woke up and looked out of the window and the boat wasn't there. He'd sailed off during the night, without even bothering to tell her where he was going, or why. She used to stand, like Dido watching for Aeneas, on Fiddler's Beach, waiting for him. They were going to be married in another two months."

"Tough on her, wasn't it?" agreed Linda generously. She added, however: "I'll bet, though, she'd made some sort of a crack at him that night before he left, and he couldn't take it."

"No, she wasn't like that when she was young. She was a rather cheerful soul then. I don't ever remember her being sour or caustic, or saying things that upset you. She was awfully sweet to me when I came here as a bride. . . . She adored your father. I think his death had as much to do with it as anything. She was very close to him."

"I know, Mother, but his death hasn't soured *you*. You're not bitter about things."

"I have *you*," Mrs. Heseltine reminded her simply. "I had something to live for, and Harriet has nothing."

"What's the matter with Grandpa?" exclaimed Linda with a burst of irritation. "After all, she's got a father!" There was a touch of bitterness in her voice which escaped her before she could control it. Afraid that she had hurt her mother by this reference to what was missing in her own life, she jumped up, saying: "I think I'll go and find Laurie."

"*Must* you?" murmured Mrs. Heseltine, in a mild tone of disapproval.

"Yes, I must. I was mean to him this afternoon, and I want to tell him that I'm sorry. Don't worry, Mother, I'll be a good girl," she added with a grin.

"It's fortunate," observed Mrs. Heseltine, "that he's going back to work at the end of the week."

Linda went out, and the screen door slammed cheerfully behind her.

CHAPTER VIII

LINDA walked along the island through the dark woods, skilfully avoiding the stones and the ruts and the mussel shells in the roadbed, with her mind skipping ahead of her buoyantly. For some reason she felt extraordinarily happy that evening. There was a curious, fluttering sensation in her chest which she laid, erroneously, to indigestion. She could not understand why she felt so elated, but she wisely did not stop to analyse her emotions but went cheerfully down the road, singing.

Night had fallen in earnest now, and the air was fragrant with the cold, clean, spicy odour of balsam and pine and fir. A light wind had sprung up and the trees were sighing among themselves. A bat swung across the road like an optical illusion—gone before she half-realized that he was there; and a half-grown rabbit leapt out of the dark under her feet and zigzagged away down the road, his little white scut bobbing up and down like an animated piece of thistle-down.

“ ‘Oh, golly!’ ” murmured Linda to herself with a little shiver of appreciation, “ ‘the island seems like heaven after a winter in town! And this warm air is divine after all that rotten fog we’ve been having for the past three weeks . . . I suppose *that’s* why I feel so happy to-night—because ‘the rains are over and gone and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.’ . . . ”

In this mood she came face to face with Laurie, who was anything but cheerful. “ ‘Hallo!’ ” he exclaimed briefly, “ ‘there you are!’ ”

His voice betrayed no enthusiasm whatever.

“ ‘Yes, here I am! I was on my way to get you,’ ” replied Linda breezily.

“ ‘Were you?’ ” he murmured dryly. “ ‘How nice!’ ”

“ ‘You’re angry, of course,’ ” she observed with a sigh. “ ‘I wish you’d let me explain!’ ”

"Don't bother," he said bitterly. "You forgot me—that's all."

"No, I didn't. That is, not really! It all happened so quickly, and the damn' boat pulled away from the wharf before I knew what was happening, and there was no way of telling you—"

"What happened to you, anyway?" he exclaimed roughly. "Did you go out in that crazy sloop of yours? I thought I asked you not to."

"No!" By now she had her arm through his and was walking him slowly down the road in the direction of the sea. Wisely, she did not try to argue with him but led him gently on towards Fiddler's Beach, where it was possible to relax and talk sensibly. The road, as usual, came out of the woods with dramatic suddenness. Under them lay the rocky beach, bathed in starlight. There was no moon, but the cloudless sky was ablaze with a million stars. It was incredibly beautiful.

Linda stole a look at his face and saw that he was unimpressed. He was staring straight ahead of him at the sea, and for all he cared it might have been a dew pond. She sighed.

"Oh, Laurie! why be so dramatic and so unreasonable?"

He turned to her and said resentfully: "You don't seem to give a damn how I feel. I thought, of course, that you'd gone out in that damn' boat and upset. That sloop is very tricky and she's hard to handle alone. I asked you not to."

"You're taking it for granted that I went out in the boat, aren't you? Well, as a matter of fact, I went to Port Hard, in the ferry."

"Port Hard! What'n hell for?"

This information did not make him any happier. The fact remained that she had broken her date with him to play tennis. He repeated angrily: "What for? What were you doing over there?"

Linda was too annoyed with him to speak. She left him and went down upon the beach, where she hunted around

until she found a convenient rock upon which to rest her back, and then sat down facing the sea. Laurie did not join her. She could hear him moving about irritably, scuffling stones with his feet and trying to light a match in the wind which was coming off the water. He cursed once or twice under his breath, and it was quite apparent that he was in a bad temper. She said nothing, however. She knew that he would join her in time. He always did, and for some reason the fact upset her. She glanced at him surreptitiously from the embrasure of the rock, but it was really too dark to see his face plainly. But she knew instinctively that his anger was dissolving gradually under pressure of the starlight, and a moment later he came and sat down beside her.

Laurie opened the conversation by saying petulantly: " You don't seem to understand how I feel!"

" How do you feel?" she murmured teasingly. " You act as though you had a ' pain in your little inside.' "

" Oh, shut up, Linda! This isn't funny."

" Why not?"

" You know perfectly well ' why not '!"

His voice trembled with suppressed excitement. Linda said nothing and looked virtuously out to sea. The deep silence between them was punctuated by the sound of a bell and the quiet rustle of the sea. A boat moved across the water, and the lights upon her masts rose and fell gently with the ground swell which was rolling in from the Atlantic. Linda wondered why the ocean never stopped moving. . . . She would have asked Laurie to explain the phenomenon, but she knew instinctively that he would not have a proper answer for it just now. His sentimental mood was growing upon him; and she realized with dismay that Fiddler's Beach had been a mistake, if she hoped to keep the evening free from drama. Just then she heard him say: " Why the hell did you go to Port Hard? You haven't told me yet!"

His voice was troubled, bewildered, and still quite angry, in spite of his growing desire to make love to her.

Also, it had a note of suspicion in it. "Why did you?" he repeated.

"God knows!" she replied after a time, with a groan. "I think I must have been out of my head! I had to sit in Port Hard all afternoon. The bus was hours late, and all I had to drink was sarsaparilla."

"You could have drunk beer," he told her unsympathetically.

"I don't like it. You know that."

"You still haven't told me why you went."

"Haven't I? I thought it was all over the island by now! Don't get so agitated," she added with a giggle.

"You sound as though I'd been having an affair with somebody. I can't believe that Aunt Harriet hasn't told you why I went to Port Hard!"

"I haven't seen your Aunt Harriet since yesterday," he replied coldly.

"Well, that's too bad! You could have heard the whole story from her and saved me the trouble of going into it again. I think," she reiterated, "I must have been a little crazy. I was going past the ferry just as Angel Face was leaving for Port Hard, and I thought—I don't know *why* I thought—it would be fun to go over and meet the Chadbournes. So I went."

"Forgetting me entirely," added Laurie grimly.

"No, not completely. I remembered you as soon as the ferry pulled away from the wharf, but Angel Face wouldn't go back. He was in a foul humour. I couldn't do anything with him. In fact, he picked on me all afternoon."

Laurie made no comment, sympathetic or otherwise. His mind, now, was on something else. "While I was out looking for you I met your mother—"

"I suppose," broke in Linda acidly, "that you told her I had gone sailing and that I was liable to upset!"

"No, as a matter of fact, I didn't. I thought I'd spare her that worry. When I asked her where you were she said—"

"Yes—go on! What did she say?"

"She said you were out sketching!"

"Well, what of it?" muttered Linda uneasily and crossly. She was overcome with dismay and annoyance. Now the secret was out! She would have no peace and very little privacy. Everybody would be in a turmoil of curiosity, and the family wits would use her as a target for their careless, insensitive humour. The trouble was, they wouldn't take her seriously. There was a tinge of mockery in Laurie's voice now. "What's so funny about that?" she demanded resentfully, with mounting indignation.

"Nothing, darling," replied Laurie indulgently, "only it doesn't seem a bit like you, does it? You're so fond of sailing and tennis and raising hell generally that I can't quite see you taking art seriously."

Linda was silent with indignation.

It seemed to her that his voice was both patronizing and contemptuous. She was highly annoyed with her mother. Now that the secret was out it would be only a question of days before the whole island knew that she was painting, and made fun of her the way Laurie was jeering at her now. "Oh, God!" she exclaimed suddenly, "I wish I lived somewhere else. I'd like you to keep your mouth shut about this, but I don't suppose you will."

"I will if you want me to," he answered. "But I don't see why you're so secretive about it. I don't understand why you couldn't have told me about it yourself—that hurt!"

Linda wondered how she could tell Laurie without upsetting him any further that, first of all, there was no reason why she should confide in him, and secondly, she knew that if she had told him he wouldn't have understood.

She decided finally that it was better not to say anything at all.

This move was unwise, because Laurie read a great many things into her silence which were not there.

Encouraged by the fact that she was in a deep and (supposedly) emotional reverie, he said: "I get upset when

you don't confide in me, but we'll skip it. Also, it was lousy of you to run off to Port Hard this afternoon, but we'll overlook that, too. I didn't come here to-night to have a row with you. I . . . I want to talk to you."

A little nameless fear ran up and down her spine.

Now! she thought, this is the moment!

"Must you?" she murmured nervously under her breath. "Do you have to talk to me now? I'd much rather you didn't." Words were dangerous commodities; they got out of hand somehow if you weren't careful with them. She was in no mood for anything serious now. The star-filled night was too lovely, too magical, for this sort of conversation. It needed a solid, unemotional room, with the lamps lit and the homely necessities of life scattered around—books and sewing and unpaid bills—things to remind you of the mundane side of existence as opposed to the romantic.

"Yes, I must," he said flatly. "I may not get another chance to talk to you. There's no privacy on this damn' island in the daytime."

"Can't you wait until the next time you come up?" she asked helplessly.

"I'm not coming up again this summer. I've got to save some money. You can't live on thirty dollars a week," he added meaningfully.

He expected her to say something to the effect that she would at least try, but she was silent.

Laurie was disconcerted, but he went on hopefully: "I don't think we'd have to live on that, actually. I'm pretty sure I can get a raise if I tell them I want to get married. I might touch the Old Man for something, but I don't know . . . Mom's alimony is pretty steep."

Hearing the fatal word "marriage," Linda found her voice. "I really wish you wouldn't talk about this right now. The night is simply divine! Why ruin it with a deep subject? I was so happy, and now you've gone and got me all confused. I came down here to have fun with you, and not . . . not . . ."

"I've got to talk to you to-night," said Laurie firmly, displaying an unexpected strength of character. "As I say, I may not have another chance."

"Why do you want to get married?" asked Linda curiously, realizing that she was in for it and that there was no escape. She was not being coy with him—she really wanted to know.

"Good God, Linda! What do you suppose? I'm in love with you!"

"Yes, I know—but you must have some other reasons," she returned impassively. "What are they?"

Laurie thought a moment, and then he said: "Why does anybody want to get married? I'm lonely, I expect. Also, I think everybody ought to get married. And after a while I want some kids. . . . We wouldn't have very much money, but I think we'd be happy—I *know* I could make you happy, darling!" he added impulsively, reaching for her hand.

Linda wasn't at all sure that he could make her happy.

The last thing in the world that she wanted, just now, was to live in a suburb of Boston with nothing ahead of her but the prospect of diapers, diapers, and then more diapers. Her youth and her ambitions would be gone before she knew it, squandered on a vortex of unpaid bills and un-washed baby clothes. And that wasn't all! Laurie was absolutely unconscious of her overwhelming desire to paint; and she was afraid that he would never grasp how much it meant to her. She could see plainly that he was totally unimpressed by what he had discovered that afternoon. He thought it was child's play. Something to tease her about.

"Look here, Laurie!" she said finally, "I'm awfully fond of you—you know that. But——"

Her voice broke because she was genuinely afraid of wounding him. Fate had treated him rather badly. His childhood had been anything but happy, and his home life had been tempestuous. His father and mother had fought passionately and loved equally hysterically during most of

it, ending with a divorce. What he wanted now, in essence, was a home where there was no quarrelling and where he could rear some children in peace and comfort.

Also—and this fact was inescapable—he was deeply in love with her. That gave her a feeling of responsibility. Because he was asking her to give him all the things which, up till now, had been missing in his universe. Peace. Security. Love without tears.

"Oh, dear!" she began again helplessly.

Laurie cut her off. "What's bothering you—the money side of it?"

"No! I hadn't thought of it. I just don't want to get married, that's all. . . ."

It wasn't as simple as that. He said to her brusquely: "Why not?"

She scowled, hunting for a way out of this dilemma which would not leave wreckage behind it.

Laurie said with finality: "You're not in love with me. That's why!"

He lay back upon the sand and gazed up at the sky. The dark-blue vault over his head gleamed with the serene brilliance of expensive crystal. The sky was so full of stars that there was hardly room enough left in it for another constellation. But he was quite unaware of the magnitude, and the splendour, of what he saw. His eyes were full of pain instead.

"I've told you that," said Linda faintly. "But even if I *were* in love with you I wouldn't marry you . . . there's something else I want."

"What?"

"If I tell you why I don't want to get married—to you or to anybody—you must promise not to make fun of me. And don't go spreading it around the island. Promise?"

"Oh, yes, I promise!" he agreed hopelessly. "Go on—tell me!"

"I want to learn how to paint."

There was a long pause; during which Laurie readjusted himself to the knowledge that she was not in love with him,

never had been, and in all probability, never would be. If she was at all in love with him, he figured sensibly, she wouldn't give a damn about art. Either that, or she would try to combine it with domesticity. She was telling him plainly that she was not in love with him, using art as a pallid excuse. "How do you know you *can* paint?" he demanded bitterly.

"I don't," she returned promptly. "But there's no harm in trying."

Lying on the beach, Laurie crossed his arms over his eyes so that she would not see how upset he was. All day long he had been looking forward to a certain moment of ecstasy, and now the moment had eluded him. For some reason he had been fool enough to believe that she was his for the asking, why he could not imagine. In retrospect he realized that she had never been really stirred by his kisses and that she had never responded as he would have liked to his ardour. Only last night he had tried to kiss her passionately, without success. Her lips had been cool and impersonal and distinctly chaste. Oh, no! she was definitely not in love with him.

Not yet. . . . But deep in his mind there remained the conviction that some day she would be.

Linda said to him: "It must be getting very late. Look! They're putting out the lights in Juniper Cottage."

C H A P T E R I X

THE day, in spite of the unanimous prediction that there would be rain by morning, was even more flawless than the day before.

Linda gazed sleepily out of her bedroom window and wondered why there were two weather breeders in a row. Then she thought: "Now I can paint those lupines! But I must get there quickly before the Chadbournes wake up and catch me at it."

She jumped out of bed and put on the first thing which

came to hand, a pair of rotting blue jeans. Over this she donned a sweat shirt. She was too sleepy and in too much of a hurry to wash herself; and as she rummaged in the closet for her painting materials she giggled, thinking: "Now I'm one of the great unwashed! I'm an honest-to-God painter like the boys from the Bronx in Port Hard!"

She could not take her art very seriously, because she knew ahead of time that her picture would be a failure. It would leave a great deal to be desired, of course, but that wasn't the point. She was going to do something which gave her a very strong and heady thrill. What came of it was another matter.

The island was still asleep, for time never bothered any of the residents very much. Nothing ran on schedule, which was one of the reasons why Mr. Heseltine found life there so restful. Linda had the woods and the road to herself. The dark trees and the chalk-white road had a scrubbed look about them. Everything was fresh and clean and tidy. The air of mystery which had made the island so charming at night had vanished and the road to the sea was cheerfully mundane.

While she walked she thought of Laurie, and she became very preoccupied. She was totally unconscious of the road and of how near she was to her destination. As a result, Juniper Cottage burst upon her suddenly, and stifling a groan of irritation and dismay she came to a full stop at the edge of the woods.

Nicholas Chadbourne was sitting among the lupines with an easel in front of him and a box of water colours at his side. He was absorbed in his work, but he heard her stifled groan and looked up. He gazed at her for a moment in silence, and then grinned.

"Hallo!" he said. "How are you this morning? I'm having the devil of a time," he added, waving his hand at the sketch in front of him. "I can't seem to manage any of these blues properly. Maybe you can help me—I need suggestions. Each lupine seems to be a different colour."

"Why are you sitting in the middle of them?" asked Linda, moving nearer and momentarily forgetting herself.
"Wouldn't it be easier if you sat up there, on the rocks?"

"Perhaps you're right. But I thought it would be amusing to do a clump of lupines with the rest of the garden and the sea as a background."

"It's an idea," she nodded. "I never would have thought of it."

"Where are you going to paint them?" he asked. "I'm afraid I'm rather in the way!"

Linda remembered herself again with a blush. She muttered something unintelligible about not wanting to paint, after all. Nicholas, not catching her reply, added:

"I suppose if you have me in the foreground it really won't matter—it will give you some practice in figure painting. I'll turn my back to you so that you won't have to paint my face and destroy the charm of the garden. I'd move out of your way, only I've got the whole thing blocked in—do you mind?"

"Why should I mind?" she murmured. "You got here first. I'm not going to paint—I'd much rather watch you. I want to see how you do it."

"Don't be stupid! Of course you must paint. You won't get another day like this—the light is superb."

"We get these days all the time," she informed him.

"Yes, but the lupines won't be in bloom for ever. I don't see why you stand there wasting your time when the light is changing every minute."

Linda replied uncomfortably that she was not a very good painter. "I've only just begun. I've never had any lessons, and I haven't the faintest idea how to go about it. I'm not very good at water colours—"

"Neither am I," broke in Nicholas, "but who the devil cares?"

There was no answer to that. The way in which he was taking her painting for granted gave her more confidence. She slung the water-bottle off her shoulder and wandered down the hill. Nicholas went back to work and forgot her

immediately. His hand moved rapidly over his sketch with short, eager strokes. Time is a necessary and very fleeting element in water-colour painting, and Nicholas was more conscious of that fact than he was of Linda. She watched him for a moment in awe—he seemed so confident—and then she quietly sat down upon a convenient rock, took out a soft pencil, and began to draw.

The sun rose farther out of the sea, and the world lost some of its freshness, but even then the lupines were the most exciting things that she had ever wanted to paint. Her desire was so imperative that she forgot everything around her, including Nicholas. And for some reason that morning her fingers obeyed her and made neat, clean lines on the paper, and the paint went on without splotches. . . .

Nicholas was finished before she was. He put away his tubes of paint and his brushes, and emptied his water-bottle on the ground. Then he stood up, with an expression of disgust on his face, and wandered off towards the sea. Obviously he was not pleased with the result of his morning's work, and wished to have nothing more to do with it. The rocks at the edge of the sea were covered with winkles. He pulled one of the little sea snails off with his fingers and examined it thoughtfully for a moment or two. Then he came up the hill again towards Linda.

"Look here" he exclaimed enthusiastically, showing her the winkle, "do you know what I think I'll do? I think I'll paint a large winkle—four or five times larger than life-size—against a background of the sea and those islands over there. What do *you* think?"

Linda considered a moment, and then she said: "It'll be quite *surréaliste*, won't it? Yes, I think it would be a swell idea. Sort of like Dali, or Pierre Roy."

Nicholas said: "You surprise me, because you don't look as though you'd ever heard of *surréalism*."

"Why not?" returned Linda coolly.

"Well, you're not the type, somehow. Sorry! I didn't mean to be personal, only . . ."

"I know! Don't bother to explain. I understand what

I look like—dumb. And when you get to know me better you'll find that I *am* dumb. I just happened to hear about surrealism because it's the fashion. I don't know a thing about painting."

After a moment Nicholas said: "Let me see what you've got there! I'll give you a criticism if you like—not that I'm much of a teacher."

Linda handed him the block silently.

This took a lot of courage, because it was the first time any one had seen her sketches. She could feel her heart throbbing with anxiety in her chest and her hands were clammy. His face was expressionless—she couldn't tell from looking at him *what* he thought. It was all very difficult, and she wished now that she had gone home. Nicholas looked up and their eyes met.

"Look here!" he said finally, "how long have you been doing this?"

"Not very long."

"You don't know a thing about it, do you?"

"No," agreed Linda miserably, "not a thing."

"I don't think you ought to be wasting your time here," he added, handing her back her sketch. "I think you ought to be studying how to do it properly."

Linda's face grew very pale. "You mean, then, that I'm no good at all. You think that it's a waste of time for me to paint."

"No, I don't mean that—not a bit of it. I meant simply that I think you ought to go and learn the right methods before you get into bad habits."

"Bombois," murmured Linda faintly, "I don't think he ever had any lessons. . . ."

"No, my dear, but he was—Bombois." He looked at her soberly for a moment and then he said: "You've got a very distinct talent but it needs development. What do your people say about all this?"

"Nothing. They don't know I've been trying to paint. At least, Mother knows, but I haven't shown her anything I've done."

" You must get over that phobia as quickly as possible, because it's the hall-mark of the amateur."

" All right, then!" said Linda with a smile. " You show me what you've done this morning."

" *Touché*," murmured Nicholas, with a laugh. " Come along and give me a criticism. I need one badly. I can't seem to make the thing come alive. There are so many blues! I don't know what's the matter."

Linda put away her materials carefully, first wiping her soiled brushes on her blue jeans and adding to their general decay. Then she followed him down the hill to his easel. Her heart gave a little twitch of joy when she saw his clear, lovely colours and his deft brushwork and his composition, because they were by no means the work of a layman. But there was something lacking. As he said himself, the picture was deficient in vitality.

" Go on!" he said, as her silence grew more prolonged.

" Tell me what you think."

" It's too cold," she replied finally. " I guess that's it. There's no gaiety about it."

" Gaiety!" he said. " I hadn't thought of it that way."

" Don't you see what I mean? Those flowers are dancing in the wind—they're never still a moment—and the air is full of sunlight. Your lupines don't move at all, and your sky is as cold as a day in March." She added tactfully: " But that's because you haven't lived here long enough. When you've been here a few weeks you'll begin to understand the different moods of the sky and the ocean. You'll be able to classify the days according to type—bright-blue days like this one, placid days when nothing extraordinary happens and the sky is full of fat little clouds, and dark, temperamental days when the sea is jade green. . . . I wouldn't try to handle it," she concluded firmly, " until you get to know the coast."

" But the whole place is so stimulating that I want to paint it," objected Nicholas. " What'll I do in the meantime—paint you?" He did not tell her that she reminded

him of Nephretiti, and that he wanted to paint her with her head tipped forward a little on her neck. . . .

A door opened behind them and Edwina wandered out into the sunshine. Both Linda and Nicholas looked at her in appreciation. She was dressed in a pair of linen slacks and a Shetland pull-over, and compared to them she looked smart and tidy.

"Ah! there you are," exclaimed Nicholas affectionately. "Good-morning, darling!"

Edwina said: "I've been watching you out of my bedroom window. The two of you looked very contented, working there side by side. Did you paint something nice for me? Did you, darling?" to Nicholas. He kissed her briefly without answering, and she added: "Or wasn't it a success?"

"It was abominable," said Nicholas tersely.

Linda exclaimed: "I told him that you can't paint the coast of Maine unless you know it well. He hasn't been here long enough. He's only been here two days!"

"She's right, Nicholas," murmured Edwina. Linda caught the look which passed between them. It was one of complete understanding, with sympathy on Edwina's side; but there was something else in it, too, which disturbed her because she could not analyse it. "There's more to this," she decided, "than meets the eye. Mrs. Chadbourne doesn't give a damn about his painting, really—she's putting on an act. I wonder why, but I don't suppose I'll ever find out."

Nicholas said that it must be breakfast time. "You'll stay and have it with us, won't you?" he added to Linda.

"Yes, do!" urged Edwina, "then you and Nicholas can paint again afterwards. You'll be able to work much harder after you've had something to eat."

Linda hesitated politely, but only for a moment, because she was very hungry and her own breakfast was a good fifteen minutes away up the hill.

Also, she wanted to paint the lupines again and have Nicholas tell her what was wrong.

CHAPTER X

EDWINA never grew entirely accustomed to the weather on the island. Some people claimed that it was predictable, but to her it remained a constant source of surprise, excitement, wonder, and diversion. At times, of course, the days were gloomy; but even when it rained she enjoyed the weather because the rain was never soft and desultory the way it was at home, or depressingly steady as in the tropics, nor did it fall with a monotonous drip. It changed tempo constantly; it ranged all the way from the pianissimo of a gentle mist to the wild forte of the cloudbursts which made the roof leak; at times the sun came through it and each drop glittered and danced into the ocean like the tiny fragments of ore in a bottle of *Goldwasser*.

Then there was the fog.

Edwina thought she knew a great deal about fog, having been born and reared in the Thames Valley. But the thick purée which blankets London had nothing whatever to do with the cotton wool which shuts down upon the coast of Maine at regular intervals. The fog here, she decided after a few days of it, was as moody as the rain. At moments it was as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp; and at others it settled into your house and your bones as though it had come to stay for ever. One minute you could see the rocks at the foot of the garden—you could count every wrinkle upon them—and the next there would be fog everywhere, in the garden, on the porch, down the chimney; fog seeping into the living-room and dissolving in the corners. There were days when it flew along the coast at a mad rate, torn in long shreds of grey mist which looked like carded wool; days which gave you a rather wild feeling, a sense almost of something impending—some excitement lying in wait behind the suffocating wall of mist which blotted out the sea. And there were other days when everything was quiet and still, the monotony of the fog broken only by the chime of a bell buoy.

After several days of fog most of the islanders became restless and bored. It had ceased to have any charm for them. The fog which rolled down upon them at the end of June was unusually thick and persistent. For three days not even the ferry ventured out in it, which gives some idea of its density because the Captain was not a nervous mariner, but he felt that it was more prudent to remain in port and not risk himself and his boat among the lobster pots and fishing smacks and other hidden dangers between the island and the mainland.

Edwina said to Nicholas: "What do you suppose would happen if someone really wanted to get a message to the island during a fog? This business of being shut off from the rest of the world is terribly quaint and all that, but don't you think they're awfully casual about it?"

Nicholas replied: "There are thousands of people living on islands in the Pacific, like this. They seem to get along perfectly well—why shouldn't you and I?"

"I wasn't thinking about us, really. It wouldn't matter if we lived on an atoll and saw a boat once a year. I was thinking of the others—Linda Heseltine especially. I can't understand why she likes the island so much—it must be terribly dull for her, without any young people."

"That's what she said about you, darling," returned Nicholas with a grin. "You ought to be in Bar Harbour, having lots of fun."

"I don't want to have 'fun.' Happiness is much more important. I know I couldn't be happy without you."

"Not even in England?"

"No, not even there."

Nicholas looked at her with a bemused smile. "Still! After all these years! I can't believe that you still care for me that much. It's very impractical of you. How can you possibly be happy under these circumstances—on a lonely island set down in the middle of a foggy ocean, with a man who's not—"

"Oh, do keep quiet, Nicholas!" exclaimed Edwina with an impatient laugh. "Don't get in that mood, now.

Incidentally, speaking of 'fun,' we've been asked to a cocktail party."

"That's nice," said Nicholas without enthusiasm.
"By whom?"

"Mrs. Gayly. While you were out sketching her little girl came with a note. I gather that the party is being given for us, so I had to accept. I hope you don't mind." As he made no comment, adverse or otherwise, she added:

"Nicholas, we can't live here in this tiny place and *not* see them once in a while. We've got to circulate a bit or they'll begin to wonder about us."

"Yes, I suppose you're right . . . it will be only a question of time before that happens, before they realize we're not . . ." His voice died with a shrug.

Edwina said soothingly: "I don't think they'll catch on very soon. It would be different on the Continent or in England, where every one knows us, or knows about us. But not here. It's too far from home."

" . . . How far from home in a world of mortal burdens, is Love, that may not die, and is for ever young. . . ."

"What's that you're quoting?"

"Something I found in a book I was reading last night. It's a rather nice poem about a hardy garden."

"When I first knew you," remarked Edwina, "we used to read poetry together by the hour, but you never do it any more. Do you remember that beach in Taormina, where you read me all of *The Ring and the Book* in one afternoon?"

" . . . Do you remember an Inn, Miranda?" murmured Nicholas. "'Do you remember an Inn? . . .'"

"I remember plenty of them," returned Edwina dryly.
"Also 'the fleas that tease in the High Pyrenees.'"

"It was fun when we were young and carefree," observed Nicholas. His face clouded, and he added: "Do you remember the time in Connemara, when I read you a poem about a fisherman?"

"By Yeats, wasn't it?"

"Yes. In the last lines of the poem he says that he would like to write for the fisherman one poem good enough to justify his own existence. That's the way I feel about my own work. If I could paint one picture that was even half-way decent—and give it to you, my dear!—I might justify the mess I've made of our lives."

Edwina was annoyed by his tone, and by his assumption that their present mode of living needed justification. Also, it irritated her to hear him infer that he was not a success. He was not in the top rank, but he enjoyed a modest fame, in England at least.

"One poem . . ." murmured Nicholas, "'one poem cold and passionate as the dawn.'"

Because she was annoyed with him, Edwina said: "If I ever hear you spouting poetry at odd moments, the way you used to, I'll know that you're in love again—and not with me!"

Nicholas rose with a laugh, and wandered over to the window. During the past hour the fog had grown even more woolly and opaque. The lupines had vanished into it permanently. He said: "We are going to get lost in the fog if we go to the party."

Edwina, who was in the mood for a little society, replied: "Yes, but we have to go, I've told you that."

"More complications! We should have gone to live, as you say, on an atoll in the Pacific where nothing matters, then we wouldn't get into these terrific situations." Edwina said nothing.

When they came out of the cottage the road was shrouded in fog. The needles on the pines and the firs glistened with steely brilliance in the dampness, and the fog sifting through the branches hung suspended among them like fronds of Spanish moss, giving an eerie effect which was lachrymose but fascinating. Edwina commented upon this, and Nicholas replied with a burst of irritation: "Damn it! I wish I could get that effect on canvas! But I can't seem to—the fog eludes me."

A dripping roof loomed up suddenly out of the gloom,

and Edwina said: "This must be the house, now." But it turned out to be a stable. Hearing voices, Lion put his head out of the window and gazed at them hopefully. "Poor Lion!" exclaimed Edwina, "I haven't got a bit of sugar for you." She went up to the window and put her hand on his nose with the mental comment that it had been ten years since she last rode a horse, and that it would be nice to be able to have one again. "I wonder," she mused, stroking his neck, "how it would seem to have all the things that used to mean so much—hunting, and shooting, and fishing, and dancing until dawn. . . ."

"Come along, darling—hurry!" urged Nicholas, who was frozen to the marrow and impatient for a drink. He strode off again into the mist, and Edwina came out of her abstraction with a sigh, kissed Lion on the nose, and ran after him. They climbed a hill, and after a while another building took shape in the fog. This time it was the Gayly house, and Nicholas sighed with relief, for by now the damp had penetrated every section of his anatomy. The Gayly house, like all the others on the island, was nondescript as to architecture but possessed a certain charm. Thirty years of wind and fog had mellowed it until it was a warm, pearly grey, and the trim was a faded sky-blue. The square patch of lawn in front of the porch was littered with bicycles, and Nicholas remarked to Edwina: "Obviously, we're the last to arrive. We must get ourselves some bicycles. Apparently every one uses them here, and it would save time—we've been at least half an hour on the way, and it should have taken us five minutes."

The small house was full of people, and a babel of voices—mostly feminine—drifted out through the open windows. The crowded rooms seemed very cheerful and civilized in comparison to the eerie loneliness of the fog outside. It was perhaps too civilized for Edwina's comfort. She half-wished that she had not come. Her footsteps lagged perceptibly behind Nicholas as he climbed the steps of the porch, and he looked back at her with a grin.

"Now who's being nervous?" he murmured teasingly.

CHAPTER XI

ABOVE the din Clarice exclaimed suddenly: "Here they are!"

Harriet said grimly to the room at large: "I don't think it was a very good day to give a cocktail party, especially for people who don't know their way around the island. I'm surprised the Chadbournes didn't get hopelessly lost."

"I'm surprised you ventured out yourself in this fog," replied Clarice tartly. "I suppose curiosity got the better of you."

Harriet was so accustomed to being snubbed by Clarice that the remark left her unruffled. As Clarice drifted away through the room towards the door she said to Mary Heseltine: "I'm not at all interested in the Chadbournes. The only reason I'm here is that Father insisted upon my coming. He's rather curious about them himself, and he wanted me to find out something about them. Linda assures him that they're very attractive, but that doesn't mean much. She's apt to get crushes on people. Incidentally, speaking of Linda, there's a rumour going around the island that she's engaged to Laurie."

"Is there?" murmured Mrs. Heseltine, instantly on her guard. She was not ready to discuss this matter with her sister-in-law.

"I just thought you ought to know. I think that Father is getting a little worried about it; he feels that Linda is too young to get married, and Laurie's not making enough money for them to live properly. Can't you do something to stop the rumour?"

"There is absolutely nothing in it," said Mrs. Heseltine flatly as the Chadbournes came through the door. "Linda has other ideas."

"What? Another man?"

"No, no, nothing like that," Mrs. Heseltine assured her.

Harriet said irritably: "I don't see why you always

have to make a mystery out of everything! Obviously there's something going on that you won't tell me."

" You'll find out soon enough," replied Mrs. Heseltine soothingly. " Look! here are Mr. and Mrs. Chadbourne."

Harriet's attention was distracted quickly from the subject of Linda; and as her eyes fell on the man and woman standing over by the door her thin lips parted in surprise. " Oh!" she said. In one swift glance she saw that the couple were not only good-looking but aristocratic; the sort of people who had, without a doubt, been everywhere and known everybody.

" Good heavens!" she said. " What in the world are these people doing here?"

" I can't imagine," murmured Mrs. Heseltine, who was wondering the same thing. " Linda was right," she added. " They are attractive. Don't you think so?"

" Oh, quite!"

Both women looked at the English couple in silence; and then Harriet remarked again that she could not understand what they were doing on Camel Island.

" No," said Mrs. Heseltine, " and I don't suppose we'll ever find out."

Harriet nodded, murmuring: " The British will never tell you anything you really want to know."

On the other side of the room Linda said to Julie Channing: " Look at Auntie's expression! What a snob the old girl is, really. She'll ask the Chadournes to dinner right away, after all that fuss. She wouldn't listen to me—I told her they were attractive."

Julie observed: " Mrs. Chadbourne's clothes are divine—Digby Morton, I suppose. It's a pity to waste those incredible tweeds on Camel Island. I suppose she thinks we're the last outpost of civilization and she ought to dress smartly to keep up her morale."

" Our morale, you mean," returned Linda. " She hasn't seen me in anything decent yet."

" What's the matter with those slacks you've got on? They look all right to me."

"Oh, they'll do in a crowd. Mrs. Chadbourne's slacks, incidentally, are divine. I suppose when she bought them she thought she was coming to some place like Bar Harbour. She must have had a shock."

Harriet had risen and was standing beside Nicholas. Her feet were firmly planted on the carpet beside him, and it was obvious that she had no intention of letting him go again until she had "placed" him to her own satisfaction. Having failed to discover anything about him in either Burke or Debrett, she was now valiantly trying to get something out of Nicholas himself, without much success; Nicholas had a bland expression, and he was answering her in monosyllables.

"You can't get much out of the British," remarked Julie to Linda, grinning.

Julie then wondered how much she could get out of Linda. What, exactly, had occurred between the girl and her son? Was Linda engaged to Laurie? Julie had asked the boy that question point-blank, and he had mumbled in reply: "Time will tell." This might mean anything, and Julie said to Linda: "I had a letter from Laurie the other day."

"Did you?" said Linda cautiously. "What did he say?"

Julie's answer surprised Linda profoundly. "He says he's coming up here again in a few weeks. I can't understand why, because when he left he said he wasn't coming back because he couldn't afford it. Do you suppose he's had a raise in salary?"

"I doubt it," replied Linda.

"I can't understand him—he baffles me," said Mrs. Channing. "You haven't an idea why he's coming?"

"No," said Linda. Not the ghost of an idea, because she had said good-bye to him permanently and irrevocably as he boarded the ferry. He had said to her in parting: "I shan't be seeing you again this summer." And from the slightly bitter tone of his voice she had gathered that he meant it. And here he was, coming back again! Her

heart gave a dull thud of dismay. She couldn't—she simply couldn't—face any more scenes like the one on Fiddler's Beach.

Linda's silence disappointed Julie, who had hoped for confidences. Only one thing had developed from this conversation: apparently they had not corresponded with each other. After a few more remarks about the Chadbournes, Julie drifted away in search of a dividend. On the other side of the room Harriet was also suffering from frustration. Every time she brought the conversation around again to England, Mr. Chadburne switched her back again to the Riviera or the Tyrol, or some outlandish little place on the Continent. She was annoyed because she wanted him to reveal certain details about his life: where his home was, where he had gone to school, what his clubs were, and who his grandfather was; but Nicholas told her instead how much he had paid for lobster in Port Hard last week, how good the fishing was in Connemara, and what the Germans ate for breakfast.

"The Germans!" interrupted Harriet, with a prolonged shudder. "We'll have trouble there, soon."

"*You* won't, but we're sure to," Nicholas told her. "Trouble in Europe is inevitable."

"I suppose that's one reason why you came over here," she added, looking him straight in the eye. "It's safer here."

"No," said Nicholas quietly. "If it happens I shall go home immediately."

Harriet switched the subject again because it was getting her nowhere, and brought up another one which was, as yet, only hearsay, but which might lead to something concrete in the way of information. "I'm told that you paint!" she exclaimed brightly. "Isn't that interesting!"

Nicholas, who was getting restless, murmured something unintelligible.

"Just as a hobby, I suppose. How delightful!"

"No," said Nicholas, "I do it as a business."

"And what name do you paint under?" she asked hopefully, still probing.

"Nicholas Chadbourne."

"Oh! your own name—I see."

Nicholas said nothing.

He wished heartily that this peculiar woman would go away and leave him alone. Her lack of femininity made him nervous, and her forthright manner was very annoying to him. She was the sort of woman, he felt sure, who made a virtue of being frank. She thought she was being subtle, perhaps, but she wasn't. He knew exactly what she wanted to get out of him, and she was beginning to make him very uneasy. American women! Half of them baffled him completely. He wished that Edwina would come and rescue him from this adult Girl Guide, but Edwina had gone into another room, so he could not catch her eye. While looking for her he caught sight of Linda, who winked at him solemnly. This gave him the idea that he must break away from this strange female at once, as indicated by the wink, or he would be lost. He said abruptly and a little rudely: "Sorry! but I have to speak to someone a moment. Do you mind awfully?" and without waiting for a reply he escaped to the other side of the room.

Harriet controlled her surprise, and her irritation, with the mental comment that most artists had bad manners, because of their peculiar temperaments. She wondered who had lured him away from her, and when she saw that it was Linda she was at first highly indignant, and then her indignation changed to astonishment and dismay.

"The little devil!" she thought to herself. "So that's her game, is it?"

The crowd was beginning to dwindle. Clarice felt that she could now relax and enjoy her own party. She poured herself out a Manhattan, and wandered off in search of Edwina. On her way she stopped to talk to Mary

Heseltine, who said: "This has been a lovely party, Clarice—we've all had such a nice time."

"I don't suppose I could really afford to give a party," replied Clarice, "but the fog was beginning to get on my nerves—it makes me gloomy—and then I decided I ought to do something about the Chadbournes, bring them out in society, as it were."

"They're awfully nice, aren't they?"

"Yes; but it must be hellish coming to a place like this where we all know each other so intimately—I know I wouldn't like it."

"Maybe they *do* like it—maybe they want to be lonely."

Clarice thought a moment, and then she said: "Now that I come to think of it, you may be right." She described the Chadbournes' arrival at Juniper Cottage, their indifference to the house itself, and their absorption with the garden and with each other's reactions to it. "They left me completely out of it," she concluded, "and it gave me a rather funny sensation."

"It may be," observed Mrs. Heseltine cynically, "that they're in love."

"Oh, no!" replied Clarice with unconscious irony, "they've been married quite a while—I found that out."

Mary Heseltine burst into laughter.

"Well, you know what I mean!" said Clarice, and wandered off again. She could hear the sound of laughter coming from the dining-room, and she went in and found Edwina, Linda, and Farr Heseltine. Farr was telling stories—some of them quite risqué; and it was quite evident that he was blissfully conscious of Mrs. Chadbourne's attractions. As Edwina's laugh rippled out, Clarice said to herself: "That woman is really gregarious, I think. She likes people. She's probably come here to this lonely, God-forsaken island because Mr. Chadbourne wanted to." During the afternoon Harriet had informed her that Mr. Chadbourne was a painter, and that might account for his

unsociable disposition. Clarice gazed at Edwina from the door, and came to the conclusion that she must be all of ten years younger than the man she had married. But then, figured Clarice, there must be some good reason why she had married him. Undoubtedly his charm—and he had plenty of that commodity—made up for some of his deficiencies, and for the disparity in their ages.

Clarice sat down beside Edwina, and a warm feeling of pleasure stole over her . . . it was good to hear laughter, to feel the sunny benison of rye stealing through one's veins, to be able to forget, even for a moment, the horrid fact that there was practically no money in the bank at all. She decided that Edwina was more beautiful than any woman she had seen—or was ever likely to see—on Camel Island, and she wondered what fateful star had dropped her there by mistake.

Her gaze shifted to Linda. “The Chadbournes will be good for her,” she thought “—give her something to think about. She needed it. There was trouble brewing there. . . .”

CHAPTER XII

NICHOLAS, of course, tried to paint the fog, without success. He produced sketch after sketch, but his painting remained static and lifeless. After a time he decided to eschew the sea and paint winkles instead—the little creatures were more stationary than the fog, and decidedly more tangible. Also, there was something rather exciting about the shape of them; the simplicity of their curves had a certain purity which can be found in the best plastic art.

Linda approved heartily of this decision, although she had tact and sensibility enough not to say so. Meanwhile she went on painting the fog herself, because she thought she knew it better.

“You've got the idea,” Nicholas told her one morning, rousing himself from his winkle painting long enough

to give her a brief criticism. "Your fog moves and mine doesn't."

"It will," Linda assured him. "Just give it time."

"No," said Nicholas, half to himself, "it won't . . . I don't know what it is, I seem to have lost something . . . I had it once."

"Had what?"

"A feeling of life and movement. Vitality. Energy. Authority. Now I can't even paint winkles."

They were sitting in the woods at the edge of Fiddler's Beach, under the comparative shelter of some alder bushes. From the hidden sea came the mournful sound of a fog-horn which Nicholas had described earlier in the morning as the mating call of a lonesome heifer. It was a lost and desperate sound, and it depressed him somewhat, but Linda was so accustomed to it that she scarcely heard it; in fact, she rather liked it because it always reminded her of home. Nicholas was painting a brown winkle attached to a rock between his feet. From time to time he looked at the winkle through a magnifying glass so that he could reproduce the delicate tracery of the lines and patterns on the shell. The result was a picture which did not please him at all. Before Linda could stop him he ripped the drawing off the block and tore it into little bits which he scattered over the alders.

"That's that!" he said briefly.

Linda looked at him soberly. "If I were Aunt Harriet I would tell you that you are too emotional. What did you want to go and throw away that drawing for? Perhaps I would have liked to have had it."

"Whatever for?"

"I thought it was good," she told him simply. "I thought it was wonderful. I loved the way you brought out those patterns on the snail's back—I never saw they were there until you pointed them out to me. Also, it was beautifully drawn—the curves seemed to *flow* out of the shell. And I liked the form of the rock."

"My dear, you flatter me. Unfortunately, I don't share

your appreciation of my art. When you've all the amount of experience I've had, you'll know that it was terrible."

Linda shook her head. "For some reason you've got an inferiority complex. You really ought to snap out of it." Then she remembered that the British dislike personalities unless you know them intimately—and sometimes not even then—and she grew a little flustered.

She did not know him at all, yet. This was only the third time she had seen him, really, since the day he had landed upon the island. He had appeared suddenly that morning at her front door and had asked her diffidently if she would like to show him another beach beside his own where he could find larger and better winkles. Then he added: "Bring along your paints, too, and I'll show you a few tricks of the trade." After a week of boredom and inertia due to the fog, the invitation seemed so alluring that she accepted it, although she felt rather shy about accepting free lessons from a man who was almost a total stranger. They had come to Fiddler's Beach an hour ago, and owing to the inclement weather they had been left undisturbed by the rest of the island.

Nicholas said to her gloomily: "I wish I thought it *was* a complex with me. I wish I could dismiss the subject from my mind as easily as that, but unfortunately the world at large agrees with my opinion of myself, and the critics keep reminding me that my paintings are anaemic."

"Why do you pay any attention to them?" asked Linda, still confident that what ailed him was lack of conceit.

"One does, unfortunately. . . . I don't know what's the matter with me," he added in dismay. "Edwina thought it might be the effect of the Côte d'Azur on my sensitive nature—it's rather tawdry in spots. She thought a change of scene might do me good."

"Was that why you came here?"

"Yes."

The pause in his voice was hardly perceptible, but it was there, nevertheless. That wasn't the reason, obviously.

However, unlike her Aunt Harriet, she had no desire to find out why he was living on Camel Island; it was none of her business. She said to him: "And I suppose, now, that you feel the change hasn't done you much good—is that it?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Don't get discouraged so soon. Look at me! I've lived here all my life and I still can't paint a fog properly. You have a distinct advantage over me, because you at least know how to begin."

"I wonder! It seems to me if I had known how to begin I might have continued more successfully." He added quickly. "But don't let's talk about me any longer. Getting back to the subject of your Aunt Harriet——"

Linda groaned. "Oh, don't let's talk about anything so depressing."

"She's a very peculiar sort of female, isn't she?"

Linda nodded. "You have to make allowances for the old girl—she was crossed in love. Has she asked you to dinner yet?"

"Why, no! But give her more time. We've only been here a short while."

"Aunty's a snob," went on Linda, "but you mustn't take her too seriously. She's anxious about your background, but she's like that and you mustn't pay too much attention to her." She added with a grin: "Aunty was very upset because she couldn't find you in either Burke's Peerage or Debrett."

Nicholas looked troubled. "Was she?" he answered.

"Yes, but don't let it worry you. She's crazy about you now, and you'll be asked to dinner at any moment. You've made the grade socially. Wasn't that an 'old school tie' you had on the other day at the party?"

"Yes, it was. Why?"

"I heard her asking Grandpa later if he knew anything about them, and I thought it probably was." She added hesitantly: "Where did you go to school—Eton?"

"No, I went to Harrow."

"Harrow-on-the-Hill."

"Yes," he smiled, "that's it. Have you been there? No? It's rather beautiful, I think. The hill rises out of a very flat stretch of country, and you can see for miles in every direction. It's especially nice in the evening when the lights begin to come out. You can see all the way to London on a clear night. It's a very steep hill, really . . . the playing fields are at the bottom of it. . . ." His voice drifted off into silence and he looked moodily into the fog, as though it symbolized a cloud of unhappiness and trouble which separated him from his home and his old school. His face lost a great deal of its usual nonchalance, and his eyes were glassy and abstracted. He seemed to have forgotten all about Linda. His mind quite obviously had returned to Harrow-on-the-Hill.

Linda tried to imagine him in a straw hat—they wore them at Harrow, she knew—a thin, blond-haired boy with an intelligent open face who was good at drawing and quoting Latin verse.

He began to speak again, and his voice was still dreamy. "I never let on that I wanted to paint. . . . Like you, I kept it to myself. That's a mistake—don't do it! If I'd started to paint when I left Harrow, I might be able to paint winkles now." His voice sounded bitter, and he added: "It was ten years before I started to paint—ten years of youth and virility 'gone with the wind.' "

"Did you fling 'roses, roses, riotously with the throng'?"

Nicholas smiled. "No, it wasn't as bad as that. I got married. Among other stupid things I went to war."

"Were you wounded?"

"Yes."

Feeling then that she had asked him perhaps one question too many, Linda decided to change the subject. She leaned forward and detached the winkle from the rock, noticing how beautiful the little shell was and how exquisitely it was formed. Not only the snail itself but a small foreign body dropped into her hand. It was about half an

inch long and looked like some pallid beetle. Nicholas asked her what it was. "That's what I wanted to show you," she said. "It's a baby lobster. They crawl into the winkle shells soon after they're born so that nothing will eat them."

"Sort of a pity, isn't it?" said Nicholas reflectively, turning the minute crustacean over in his fingers. "All that trouble and bother, and they get eaten eventually by us. . . ." He studied it for a moment, and then he exclaimed: "I don't see why I couldn't put the lobster in my picture, too, as though it had just dropped out of the shell! It's an idea!"

"Why, yes!" agreed Linda, "so it is."

The fog was lifting a trifle. She could see the tip end of the crescent which formed Fiddler's Bay and the white tower of the deserted lighthouse at the end of the island. Perhaps if she held her breath and counted ten it would lift entirely and reveal the sea for the first time in a week, and she could go sailing that afternoon.

"Look!" said Nicholas, "the fog is lifting. If it clears I shall be able to start my *surréaliste* picture. I need a blue sky for a background. And you," he added, "can paint the lupines."

"Maybe."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic!"

"I am—only, I thought I might go sailing instead."

"Don't," he advised her. "The lupines won't be in bloom very long."

"I don't think I'd better paint this afternoon. You don't want me around all day."

"I rather like company when I'm out painting," he told her. "For some reason I find it stimulating. I shall be able to paint a much better picture if you come along." She murmured something, and he added: "Please! I need you—to help me hunt for winkles."

His voice was flippant as usual, but it sounded quite sincere. He seemed eager to have her go along. It would

be silly to keep on saying "no"—especially if he wanted her that much.

"All right," she said slowly, "if the fog clears off I'll meet you after lunch, anywhere you say."

"The fog's rising now," said Nicholas. "Look! There's a patch of blue over our heads."

C H A P T E R X I I I

EDWINA noticed that the fog was lifting. With an exclamation of surprise she put on her waterproof and went out into the garden. The sea was splashing briskly on the rocks at the foot of the terrace, and the waves were capped with little plumes of spray. The wind had torn a large rent in the clouds over the island, revealing a patch of blue sky; it would be only a question of time before the whole sky would be visible once more. The lupines were swaying madly in unison, motivated by the same rhythm which was making the waves dance, and the air—which had been dead and sodden ever since the rain began—was already full of life. The wind was blowing out of the north. It was chilly but invigorating. The excitement in the air was contagious, and there was something dramatic in the way the sky and the sea and the island were coming alive after days of lethargy.

The lupines were still sodden with moisture, but Edwina picked an armful of them for the house because they would be gone in another day or so. The racemes were growing untidy, and she saw that the flowers were going to seed with a pang of regret. In a few days their bloom—so brief and so dramatic—would be over for another year. She hated to see them go because they symbolized the happiness she had found on the island. Every one had been so good to them, and Nicholas was happier than he had been in years. And, in spite of its leaky roof, she loved her dilapidated little cottage. She liked to go to bed at night and hear the ocean murmuring and splashing and gurgling

to itself under the window, and wake up in the morning and see the lupines clustered like a handful of sapphires between the house and the sea.

Her happiness frightened her a little, because it was unusual. Then she told herself vigorously that she was being a fool. "Nothing can happen to us here!" she said. "This place is too far from home!"

Over theplash of the sea came the sound of a bicycle bell. Edwina wondered who was coming to call on her at that hour of the day. The visitor turned out to be Harriet. She issued uncertainly from the woods on her bicycle and wavered down the hill to the front steps. Then she dropped the machine into the blueberry bushes with an expression of relief, and looked around her.

"Hallo!" said Edwina politely. "Here I am!"

"Oh, hallo!" said Harriet, with obvious satisfaction. "I can't stay but a moment. I came to ask you to dinner Saturday night. I do hope you can come."

"Why, yes, I think we'd love to!" exclaimed Edwina, wondering what Nicholas would say. He might be full of objections, so she left herself a loophole. "But I'll have to wait until Nicholas comes home, because he may have made other plans . . . he said something about a picnic." This wasn't true, but it would do.

"That's quite all right," said Harriet amiably. "How do you like your house?"

"Oh, very much!"

"There are bats in the attic, I believe. Have you been troubled with them?"

"No, not a bit."

"They get in your hair, you know. The last people who rented the house used to kill them with tennis rackets. And the red squirrels are a nuisance. You must get a cat."

"Nicholas doesn't like cats very much," murmured Edwina.

"Captain Angel can get you a cat in Port Hard for three dollars."

"Isn't that rather expensive?"

"No—they've all got long hair—that seems to be the regular price. There's quite a demand for them. The summer people keep the price up."

"Won't you come in?" said Edwina, changing the subject.

"Thanks, I will. But only for a minute. I just want to see if you're comfortable."

"Let's have some sherry," Edwina added hospitably. "It's cold and raw out." She went to get the bottle and some glasses; and Harriet's eyes wandered around the room in pursuit of some clue to the Chadbournes' private life. There was a photograph on the centre table and she examined it with an innocent expression. It was a portrait of a woman who resembled Mrs. Chadbourne, but who was not as beautiful, in a spangled dress with a train. She was wearing long white gloves, and perched on top of her head were three white ostrich feathers. It was the feathers that interested Harriet—someone, obviously a relative of Mrs. Chadbourne's and probably her mother—had been presented at Court. That indicated a lot of things.

Then she noticed the stack of canvases leaning against the wall. She was about to take a surreptitious peep at one of them when Edwina came through the door with the sherry. "Your husband tells me that he paints," Harriet said bluntly, pointing to the assembled canvases, all of them with their backs to the room. "Is that some of his work?"

"Yes," nodded Edwina, not offering to exhibit them, "he's out sketching now."

"Has he been painting very long? I mean, is he an established artist?"

"He's been painting for about ten years. When you say, 'Is he an established artist?' I suppose you mean, 'Is he famous?' He's fairly well known in England and on the Continent, but I don't suppose that America has heard of him yet. I believe that he's going to have a show in New York next winter, however."

Harriet said nothing for a moment; she was thinking:

" If I get some old copies of the *Studio*, perhaps I can find out who he is."

" Will you have another glass of sherry?" said Edwina politely, reaching for the bottle.

" Oh, no, thank you!" replied Harriet, rising. " I must go. I have three more calls to make before lunch—it's a nuisance not having telephones on the island, but Father won't hear of putting them in. I can hear that your pantry tap is still dripping—Clarice tried to fix it, but I suppose her hands weren't strong enough. If you'll take my advice, you'll send for a plumber. The well here is apt to run dry, and you'd better not waste any water. Clarice is rather vague—I don't suppose she told you any of those things. . . ."

" She *did* say that the well goes dry sometimes in August—but August is a long way off."

" Yes," thought Harriet to herself, " and by that time you'll be in Bar Harbour, without a doubt." Aloud she said: " You'll let me know, then, as soon as you can about Saturday night? Seven-thirty, and of course we don't dress. Just a little print frock, or something like that, will do. We're very informal here. It's not at all like Bar Harbour—we come up here to relax and have fun. It's very restful after the formality of the winter."

" Yes, it must be," said Edwina vaguely. It was almost lunch-time, and she wondered where Nicholas was. Her mind wandered out of the door into the sunlight.

They were standing by the centre table and Harriet said innocently, pointing: " What a lovely picture! She looks very much like you. Is it your mother by any chance?"

" No, it's my sister," replied Edwina briefly.

" Oh, is it?" exclaimed Harriet, and waited hopefully for name, age, and place of birth. But she was again disappointed. Edwina moved on towards the open door, saying joyfully: " Oh, look! the sun's really out now. It's going to be a heavenly afternoon. Nicholas has been wanting to paint the sea for days—he'll be so pleased!"

Harriet was profoundly annoyed by the Chadbournes'

unwillingness to talk about themselves. "There's something a little queer about this," she said to herself flatly as she stepped out into the garden. Not that the Chadbournes themselves were odd or extraordinary in any way—on the contrary, they seemed to be the sort of people one knew—but it *was* a little strange that they would not talk about their life in England. They were so close-mouthed about anything which might reveal who, and what, they were.

The lupines were dancing merrily in the wind, and Edwina said with enthusiasm: "Aren't my flowers lovely? I'm so excited about them!"

"Lupines breed aphids—you'd better be careful," said Harriet, climbing aboard her bicycle. "Good-bye!"

Edwina watched her disappear into the woods with a thoughtful expression. "There," she said to herself, "is a very strange person . . . she's very bitter about something. She'll be dangerous, maybe. . . ."

Harriet pedalled slowly and awkwardly along the dark woods, inexpertly dodging the rocks and the mussel shells in the roadbed. Her next port of call was the Gayly house. She stayed there perhaps five minutes, which gave her time enough to ask Clarice to dinner, advise her what to wear, and report on the dripping pantry spigot at Juniper Cottage. Clarice reminded her with annoyance that there had been a dense fog for the last seven days, and that no plumber had been available for that period of time.

"Before that," she said, "it didn't drip."

"I'm just telling you," said Harriet mildly, preparing to remount her bicycle.

"Who else is coming, besides the Chadbournes?" asked Clarice. "Is it going to be a large dinner party?"

"I'm asking Farr and Maribel, and Mary."

"Not Linda?"

"No, not Linda." She had her own cogent reasons for not asking Linda, but she did not reveal them to Clarice. An explanation was necessary, however, so she added: "I'm not having any young people."

"That'll be tough on the younger set," Clarice told her. "They've all got a crush on Mr. Chadbourne. They think he's 'just too divine.' "

"Well, somebody else can give a picnic for the Chadbournes, and ask the young. I don't want too much excitement in the house just now. Father's gout is really quite bad. But he's getting bored, so I thought I'd have some people to dinner and it seemed the logical moment to ask the Chadbournes. I have to do something for them, I suppose."

"Yes, I suppose you do," said Clarice innocently.

Harriet sailed off jerkily again, like a skiff in a rough breeze. The road meandered on through the woods in the general direction of the Hump. The noise of the sea grew louder. Fiddler's Beach lay ahead. She could hear the gulls screaming with excitement because the fog had lifted. The waves were breaking loudly and noisily upon the pebbled shore, and the island seemed agitated and full of excitement after seven days of fog. When alone, Harriet relapsed very often into a mood of sentiment. She thought now how much she loved Fiddler's Beach, and her mind went back to the happy days she had spent there as a child before the boat, the *Black Watch*, had come and destroyed her faith in human nature. It was here on this very spot that Winsloe had said good-night to her, on that fatal evening before he sailed off into the outside world and left her stranded. He was married now, to a woman who came from—of all places—Pittsburgh. . . . She was well out of it, of course, but she couldn't help thinking of Winsloe every time she got near Fiddler's Beach. They used to sit and talk to each other—and occasionally they would kiss each other—under the lee of some alder bushes which, unfortunately for her peace of mind, were still growing in the same place. When she was in a particularly sentimental mood she would leave the road to have a look at them and allow herself a moment or two of unhappiness.

Perhaps it was the excitement in the air that morning, or perhaps a week of dense fog had made her moody and senti-

mental; but with a little sigh she got off her bicycle, dropped it at the side of the road, and went towards the beach. There was a couple sitting under the alder bushes, and for one wild, hysterical split second she thought that she was looking at herself and Winsloe. But it was only Mr. Chadbourne and some woman. Her waterproof looked vaguely familiar, and she realized with a horrid shock that it belonged to Linda—the woman *was* Linda!

The sea was very noisy, for the wind had risen considerably during the last half-hour, and they did not hear her—they were not at all conscious of the fact that she was standing behind them. Mr. Chadbourne had been painting; his box was open beside him and he had a large water-colour pad on his knees. But what was remarkable about the scene was that Linda had been painting too! She actually had a brush in her hand, and she was putting the finishing touches to a picture of the beach in front of her.

Harriet was speechless with curiosity.

Over the splash of the incoming tide she could hear Linda saying: "The fog has lifted so much that I can't really finish this decently. I've forgotten what it looked like."

"Never mind," said Mr. Chadbourne. "There'll be another one soon. It really has lifted now, so that we can be sure of being able to paint this afternoon. Will you come to the house after lunch?"

"Yes. . . ."

Harriet turned away, and went thoughtfully back to her bicycle. . . . The two of them were sitting there alone and unchaperoned, and Mrs. Chadbourne was waiting for Mr. Chadbourne at Juniper Cottage. Apparently they had not asked her to go with them. . . . "How long," she thought, "has this been going on? Not more than two weeks, because the Chadbournes haven't been here longer than that. And she's going out with him again this afternoon!"

She left the beach behind her and laboriously climbed up the hill through the woods. Eventually she had to get off and walk, pushing the bicycle along with her. Her face

was pale and her eyes were bright with agitation and dismay. "But I mustn't jump to conclusions," she told herself calmly. "There may be nothing in this at all. I must keep my head."

Mary Heseltine was at the luncheon table when she arrived. "I had lunch early because I want to go to Port Hard this afternoon if the ferry goes," she explained. "Have you any idea whether the Captain has made up his mind yet?"

"No—I haven't laid eyes on him for two days."

"Have some lunch," added Mrs. Heseltine. "We're reduced to eating out of cans because of the fog, but we can open some more corned beef hash for Linda when she comes."

"No . . ." said Harriet absently, "thank you very much, but I'm only going to stay a moment. I must get back to Father. I came to ask you to dinner Saturday night."

"That's nice. Does the invitation include both Linda and myself?"

"No," said Harriet almost violently.

"Just the grown-ups?"

"Yes. . . ."

Mary Heseltine wondered a little why her child was not asked, and decided that Harriet was in one of her moods. Her face looked strained and peevish and her mouth was set in a thin grey line. "Would you like a drink?" she asked her amiably. "You look cold and tired."

"No, thanks, I've had one. Mrs. Chadbourne gave me some sherry."

Harriet sat down at the other end of the table and absently helped herself to a cigarette. She lit it and sat there quietly for a moment, not saying anything. Mary Heseltine urged her again to stay for lunch, saying: "Please stay! Linda will be here in a moment, and the two of you can have it together."

Harriet shook her head. "No, Father's waiting for me. I must go in just a moment."

But she did not move from the end of the table, and Mary Heseltine wondered a little apprehensively what was coming next. Apparently Harriet had something on her mind.

"Laurie!" thought Mrs. Heseltine. Then, with a pang of dismay: "She's going to give me a lecture on Laurie! I know—I can feel it coming. What do I do now? Tell her to mind her own business, or suffer in silence? I'm getting awfully tired of these lectures——"

Harriet cleared her throat with a sudden grating noise which made her sister-in-law jump with nervousness.

"Mary, dear," she began ominously, "have you any idea where Linda is this morning?"

Mary knew exactly where Linda was, but she was not going to reveal anything to Harriet, yet, because Harriet kept so few things to herself. Linda had gone sketching, but the only thing to do, now, was to pretend that she had no idea where she was.

"I don't know," she replied evasively. "I think she went for a walk. Why? Did you want her for anything?"

"No," said Harriet. After a moment she added grimly, "I do know where she is. I saw her ten minutes ago."

"Where?"

"Fiddler's Beach."

"Oh! is that where she went?"

"Yes. She had a paintbox with her, and she was making a sketch of the ocean and the rocks."

"Was it any good?" inquired Mary ingenuously.

The question seemed to make Harriet angry. "I don't know whether it was any good or not," she retorted impatiently. "That's not the point. She wasn't alone!"

Mary Heseltine knew that, too, but she kept quiet.

"Mr. Chadbourne was with her. They were sitting there, under the alders. They were alone together, without a chaperone. Mrs. Chadbourne was at home, waiting for him."

"Yes, but what of it?" put in Mary hurriedly. "You don't seem to understand. Linda——"

"I don't care what explanation they have to offer—the whole thing *looks* perfectly frightful!" cried Harriet indignantly. "She's been after him since the first day he came to the island—before that, really! Do you remember how she went to Port Hard to meet him? She was bored to death and she was out for trouble—any man would have satisfied her."

"*Harriet!*"

Mary Heseltine's shocked and outraged cry brought her sister-in-law down to earth somewhat. In a little milder voice she added: "Well, I won't say that—he is attractive. But, my God! Mary—he's *married*! This thing ought to be stopped at once."

"Oh, Harriet!" protested Mary in a disgusted voice, "you're imagining things. You still haven't let me explain—"

"The worst thing about it to me, is the way she's taken up painting just so that she can be with him. The little fool thinks that she can get him that way. What's she going to do with him when she *has* him? He's married!"

Mary Heseltine was furious. Her hands were trembling so that she had to put down her fork before she spoke. "Look here, Harriet! You've *got* to let me have a word or two. I've been keeping all this from you because I knew you'd spread it all over the island. For some reason, which I think I can understand, Linda didn't want any one to know that she was trying to paint. You know what this place is like—if anybody does anything unusual they're the butt of everybody's jokes. Linda didn't want to be made fun of—she was in deadly earnest about this thing—so she kept quiet about it. She's been painting for weeks—long before she laid eyes on Mr. Chadbourne. You can ask your father about it—he knows."

"Why wasn't I told?"

"Nobody was—don't take it personally. 'Grandpa' and I found out by accident. I haven't yet seen anything she's done. She keeps them all locked up in her bureau drawer. She'll show them to me when she feels like it.

But that's not the point of this argument. What I'm trying to convey to you is the fact that Mr. Chadbourne had nothing whatever to do with Linda's desire to become a painter—she was doing it before he got here. The reason she's with him now is that he very kindly offered to give her some lessons. If you like, I'll chaperone her in the future, only—it seems so horribly Victorian! The whole thing's idiotic, anyway," she added crossly. "*He's* in love with his wife. Any fool can see that, and I don't think my child is *dumb*."

Harriet was silent. She said nothing at all in reply, and it was a pregnant silence. Mary knew that she was still turning the subject over in her mind and that she was only half-convinced. Mary's anger knew no bounds; she was only holding it in check because she was afraid of ever telling Harriet exactly what she thought of her. So far they had never had a real ~~row~~, and she hoped sincerely that they never would, for Mr. Heseltine's sake. "When he dies," Mary thought to herself now, "I'll let go . . . but not until then."

"Well . . ." said Harriet finally, "that may be perfectly true. As you say, she may have been painting for weeks. But just the same, I wouldn't feel comfortable, if I were you. He may be in love with his wife—which I doubt, because I think he has a roving eye—but, say what you will, there's something in what I've told you."

"What makes you so positive?" said Mrs. Heseltine crossly. "Surely you must have some good reason for saying all this. What is it? Come on, now, out with it!"

Harriet flushed grimly, and rose.

"I've never seen Linda look so happy—that's why. She was positively radiant. It was written all over her."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. HESELTINE went out on the porch and sat down in a large rattan chair facing the sea. He wondered if he could possibly relax enough to take a little nap. For some reason he felt extraordinarily restless. He could not understand why, but the afternoon seemed to drag. He was so accustomed to having nothing to look forward to that the mere prospect of having asked someone to tea made him feel excited and wakeful. But there was no real reason for this bubbling sensation in his chest which made him feel so breathless and uneasy. He could not analyse it.

The day was soft and clear and unexciting—just a pleasant day with a number of woolly little clouds in the sky and medium-sized waves without caps of spray upon them; and the air was balmy and warm and from the garden came the drowsy hum of bees among the delphiniums. Far away down the hill on Fiddler's Beach half a dozen children were at play, and their shrill young voices echoed happily across the quiet afternoon. Little cat boats were scattered around the island, moving sedately along with a gentle breeze, and the inevitable lobster boat went past towing a string of colourful dories. . . . Mr. Heseltine felt contented and strangely happy—everything seemed very pleasant and comfortable that afternoon. Patsy Gayly had come past the house shortly after lunch on her way to pick wild strawberries near the old light-house, and she had informed him that Linda and Mr. Chadbourne were sketching a pile of lobster pots which someone had left on the rocks below the Gayly house. She had also informed him that Mrs. Chadbourne had *not* gone to Port Hard with the rest of the women, but that she was taking a sunbath in front of Juniper Cottage. Mr. Heseltine had thanked her for the information; and again he had reflected how stupid and unnecessary it would be to go to the expense of putting telephones on the island when the grapevine system worked so perfectly. This was the

opportunity which he had been hoping for, and expecting, for almost two weeks. Feeling vaguely excited he had sent Sam down the hill with a note asking Mrs. Chadbourne to come up the hill for tea. For some inexplicable reason he could not get her out of his mind. Her beauty, and the baffling, rather unhappy expression in her eyes, haunted him whenever he could not sleep at night. And in less than two hours, now, she would be in his house again, talking to him in that lovely English voice which made the prickles run up and down his spine.

Sleep eluded him. Although ostensibly quiet, the afternoon was full of sounds. Added to the children's voices was the phut-phut of the lobster boat, and on shore he could hear Lion plodding up the hill from the stable. The buck-board was full of manure for the garden and it bumped noisily and heavily over the uneven road with a sharp, wooden sound. Someone was tinkering with an outboard motor which had a defective carburettor; it would whine for a moment like an angry bee, and then stop suddenly with a choke. And running like a thread of melody, a leit-motif, through all these noises was the song of the white-throated sparrows and the wrens and the chickadees, and the murmur of the wind in the firs.

Lion appeared suddenly around the corner of the house and drew up in front of the garden. He was covered with moisture from his long pull up the hill, and he looked at Mr. Heseltine almost resentfully, as though he objected to his servitude and wanted—like his owner—to go to sleep. Moved with sympathy, the old man rose and went out to him with a word of encouragement.

Sam remarked: "He's gettin' old. He don't like comin' up the hill any more. It's all I can do to get him up here now."

"How old is he?" asked Mr. Heseltine with a frown.

"Must be nearly twelve years old, ain't he? We got him the summer that Lindbergh flew the Atlantic, and he was two years old then, so he must be twelve now."

"He's too old to pull that heavy wagon up the hill! We must get another horse, I suppose."

"What'll we do with him, then?"

"I don't know."

Sam added: "If you was to shoot that horse everybody would have fits. They're awful attached to him."

Mr. Heseltine was very attached to Lion himself so he did not argue the point. He said: "The trouble is, Sam, that we're all growing older, and soon none of us will be able to climb the hill without feeling tired. That's why I ask people to come and see me nowadays—I can't get up and down the hill. I'm worn out, too. And I know how I'd feel if any one suggested shooting me, so I don't think we'll shoot Lion."

Both of them looked at the old horse in silent tribute to his years of usefulness. "He was a good investment," said Sam finally. "I remember we only paid fifty dollars for him because he was supposed to have something the matter with him. What was it now?"

"I don't remember."

Edwina came out of the woods and joined them, and Mr. Heseltine greeted her with an exclamation of pleasure: "How sweet and charming you look after your long walk up the hill!" He waved his hand at the weary horse and added: "We were just saying that some of us can't 'take it' any more. Lion and I are about to be retired. We are going to buy another horse to take his place, but we haven't quite decided who to get in place of me."

"There is no one who could do that," she smiled, giving him a warm feeling around the heart. How pretty she looked standing there against the dark trees, and how terribly young! She was at least thirty years his junior, and his heart sagged uncomfortably in his breast when he realized how young she was. He stroked Lion with a gesture of sympathy because Lion was growing old and feeble too.

"Do you ride?" he asked her. She told him that she had been very fond of hunting when she was young, and

he exclaimed: "What do you think you are now—old and feeble like us? You look about sixteen."

"I'm twice that," she informed him.

"No matter. You're still young enough to ride a horse. You'll have one again some time. Not this summer, but maybe next summer."

"What makes you think I want one?"

"Because you've been patting Lion with a sort of hungry look. It's a pity you had to give up hunting if you're that fond of it." He said cheerfully: "I have had to give up practically everything that made life worth living, and I find that renouncement makes one very dull and querulous. There are practically no compensations for having to sit in a rocking-chair on the porch when there is a good sea running."

"Don't you ever go sailing any more?"

"On very calm days I am taken out in somebody's yacht like an old woman in a bath-chair, but otherwise I do my sailing like this from the porch."

Edwina looked at the view, and the flower beds hovering between the sky and the sea, and heard the birds singing in the fir trees, and smelled the forest. And she thought: "I know why he still comes here, year after year, even though he can't sail any more. I think I'd do the same thing."

Aloud she said: "But you're happy! And so am I."

"I'm glad. Now perhaps you'll stay with us for a while. Harriet was afraid you might grow tired of us and move to Bar Harbour. It's very dull here, of course, but we all love it. . . . Does it remind you at all of Scotland?"

"No, it doesn't really. I was told that it would, and I expected the Camden Hills to look like the Trossachs. But the mountains in Scotland are a different colour, and they are . . . smoother."

Her voice went on again uncertainly. "I used to go to the Trossachs every summer with my father. He was a very keen fisherman. I loved the clear brooks with the little mountain trout in them . . . it was a lot of fun."

"And have you given up fishing too, as well as hunting?" inquired Mr. Heseltine with sympathy.

Edwina shook her head with a laugh. "No. I went fishing yesterday evening, by special invitation, with the Gayly children and Sam off the end of the dock; pollock fishing."

"Nasty fish, pollock. Too many bones. And a distinct come-down, I'd say, from trout and salmon."

"Yes, but fun in a way."

Mr. Heseltine said: "And what does your husband like in the way of sport—does he shoot?"

"Not any more," she said briefly.

Mr. Heseltine looked at her reflectively. "It must be rather difficult," he added, "to give up so much at your age. I think you're very cheerful about it."

Edwina laughed but said nothing. She did not explain why they had given up so much. She called his attention to a bird which was singing very loudly and melodiously from a birch tree at the side of the house and asked him what it was.

Mr. Heseltine replied with a smile: "That, my dear, is our vastly underrated bird the white-throated song sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis*. It is probably the nearest thing we have to the European nightingale, because it sings at night when the moon is full. They sing so loudly at times that they keep me awake. But I don't mind, because it is very interesting to hear them singing to each other across the island. Every bird seems to have a different pitch. Some of them are A major, and some are A flat, some are even off key. Lovely song, isn't it?" he added as the bird sang again.

Edwina did not answer him. While the bird sang her mind had wandered back to the copse at Prince Setton where Nicholas had led her one evening when Gertrude and the rest of them were playing bridge. A nightingale had been pouring its heart out to the moon, and when the bird finally grew tired of singing and flew away he had quoted her most of Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*. . . . She

sighed involuntarily, and when she raised her eyes she found Mr. Heseltine looking at her with an odd expression.

"They remind you of England, I suppose," he remarked disconcertingly.

"They do, rather," she admitted in a low voice. His eyes were so benign and kindly that she added on an impulse: "There's no use in my saying I'm not homesick, because I am. And so is Nicholas, I'm afraid. But it's not because we don't love the island. We're terribly happy here. But it's not England."

"I know. But you'll be going back there when autumn comes, won't you?"

"No."

Mr. Heseltine looked pensively away towards the misty blue horizon where Europe lay. He wisely refrained, however, from asking her any more questions. The white-throated sparrow had moved to a lilac bush near the porch and his song rose jubilantly in the quiet afternoon. They listened to it in silence, in tribute to its piercing loveliness. But their silence was a little constrained. It was brought to a sudden, and merciful close by Patsy Gayly, who stepped out of the woods carrying a tin pail in one hand.

"Hallo!" she exclaimed, blushing with pleasure, "tea-time!"

Mr. Heseltine said to her rather roughly: "Go away, Patsy. There's nothing for you."

"Oh, please, Nunky. Just one little cake. See! I've brought you a whole quart of wild strawberries."

"To what do I owe this sudden popularity? Cake, I presume. I'm afraid it's cupboard love. Run away, Patsy!"

"Oh, please, Nunky!"

"No!" roared Mr. Heseltine. "I said positively no children this afternoon."

"Very well, then," she said primly, "if you don't want my strawberries I'll give them to Mr. Chadbouren—he

adores them. He's painting with Linda now in front of our house."

And with that she moved off again down the hill. Edwina found her voice. She said feebly: "Don't you think the poor child could have had one little cake? She looked hot and tired."

"No," replied her host, "if we give one child a cake we'll have to feed half a dozen." As it seemed heartless he added: "Quite selfishly I wanted to be alone with you this afternoon. Farr monopolized you the other night when you came to dinner. And after dinner Harriet took you off into a corner and kept you to herself all the rest of the evening."

Edwina said to him cautiously: "Was there anything you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Oh, no," he replied, "nothing in particular. It was simply the desire of an old man to renew the pleasures of his youth in your company. I may as well tell you," he added, "that it has been many years since we have had a woman on the island who had your looks and your charm. It has brought something very refreshing and very pleasant into our lives."

"Why, thank you!" said Edwina, blushing faintly. "That's very nice of you to say that. You've all made me feel very much at home here. . . . I was very touched when you asked me up the hill for tea."

"Tea!" said Mr. Heseltine. "That reminds me. Where the devil is it? Josie!" he shouted, "hurry up!"

Josie, he explained to Edwina, had been his cook for over thirty years. She was the Captain's wife. He was a small man, but Mrs. Angel was immense. Her girth was incalculable; as a rough guess she might have been a size fifty-two. Owing to her weight her reflexes worked slowly, and her unhurried motions had a calming effect on every one who came in contact with her. "You can't hurry her," Mr. Heseltine said, "and it's rather restful. . . . Here she is now."

Mrs. Angel appeared with the belated tea-tray.

"Well!" she exclaimed cheerfully to Edwina, ignoring the fact that she was over half an hour late with the tray, "and how's Mrs. Chadbourne this afternoon? I had no idea you was comin' to tea. Mr. Heseltine didn't say who he was havin'. I kinda thought you'd gone to Rockland with the folks. It was 'Dollar Day'—did they tell you?"

"Yes," said Edwina, "but I didn't need to buy anything so I stayed at home."

"Harriet was tellin' me you need a cat. Why don't you let the Captain get you one in Port Hard? Them squirrels are an awful nuisance."

"I should love to have a cat," replied Edwina, "but Mr. Chadbourne doesn't like cats. He says they make him sneeze."

"That's too bad! A kitten would be nice company for you. You must be kind of lonely here, not knowing everybody."

After she had gone Mr. Heseltine said: "You mustn't mind Josie. She's a bit familiar, I know, but we've had her so long that she doesn't know exactly where her 'place' is, and nobody cares. She began to cook for my father when she was seventeen." He waved his hand at the tray and added: "You must pour, my dear. The tea is Hu Kwa, and I don't know whether you like smoky tea or not. If you don't, we have some Orange Pekoe in the house. The little cakes are a specialty of the house; Mrs. Angel cut the recipe out of the Rockland newspaper."

Edwina sat down at the tea table. Her hands moved gracefully and swiftly over the silver service with the ease born of long practice, and Mr. Heseltine watched her movements with a growing sensation of contentment and happiness. Her beauty was as lovely and as heart-warming to him as the sunshine of the summer afternoon, and her youth stimulated him like a glass of Pol Roger. It was almost as though a fresh, blithe, invigorating wind had sprung up on the tranquil harbour of his existence and borne him out to sea again.

Edwina was examining the cup in her hand. "What is

this china?" she asked. "I should recognize it but I don't. My mother collected china."

"It's Nanking," he replied. "My grandfather brought it home with him on a clipper ship in the fifties. When I was a boy we had loads of Nanking, but it's all gone now except these few pieces. I'm not supposed to use them."

"We had loads of Rockingham and Worcester at home," said Edwina, putting down the cup, "but it's all gone too."

Mr. Heseltine wanted to ask her about her home, but he refrained as she did not seem communicative. Her expression made him feel uncomfortable, because her eyes were dark with some hidden emotion, possibly homesickness. He changed the subject and said: "Linda tells me she has been out sketching with your husband every day lately. Evidently he's been giving her lessons."

"Nicholas says she's very keen. . . ."

Mr. Heseltine said searchingly: "Does he think she has any talent?"

"Oh, yes. But he thinks she ought to have some proper lessons at an art school."

"You mean," he exclaimed in surprise, "that he really thinks she's that good?"

"Oh, decidedly. Have you seen anything she's done? They're rather nice. Her style is very free and vigorous, and her colours are clear, and she has a good sense of values. Her composition isn't bad, either."

Mr. Heseltine stared thoughtfully at the ocean and turned the matter over in his mind. He was thoroughly surprised and not a little excited. The Heseltine family had never produced an artist before. One or two of them had written very deep literary articles for a magazine published in Boston, and his father had been a friend of Emerson's. But none of them had had a desire to paint. He was pleased, but anxious, about his granddaughter's talent. He said sceptically, "I don't know whether she'll be able to paint at all—she's been coddled since birth. She's never had to fight very hard for anything she wanted. I don't

know whether she's got any staying powers. However, I would like Linda to paint. I think it is an excellent career for a woman. But, on the other hand, I don't want her to get hurt; I don't want her to paint unless she's really good at it. If she tries and fails it may make her bitter."

"I wouldn't worry about that," returned Edwina. "If she wants to paint—and I think she does—nothing will stop her. I've seen it in Nicholas. He had the same sort of life, in a way. He was even more spoiled, perhaps. He was . . ."

Her voice stopped.

Mr. Heseltine said with a nod: "I know! You don't have to go on. I've been in England enough to know what Nicholas was. I can see it all, even the 'old school tie.'"

Edwina smiled, and went on again. "He was mad to paint from the time he was a small boy at Harrow. But they wouldn't let him. They were going to send him to Cambridge, but the war came along and they put him in the Guards. After the war he came back to England and settled down to lead the life of a country gentleman, but . . ."

"You came into his life," murmured Mr. Heseltine, "and gave him the incentive to break away and become an artist. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, that was it."

Mr. Heseltine continued: "You gave up everything you wanted, even children, so that he could succeed. You could not lead a Bohemian life with a family of small children, and Bohemia was what he needed. I suppose there were compensations or you wouldn't have done it. How long has this been going on?"

"Ten years. . . ."

"Ten years!" he mused. "That's a long time in any partnership. It's supposed to be a dangerous time in marriage. . . . Forgive me if I sound impertinent in asking you all these things, but your life interests me strangely. . . . I could see the other night that Farr and Harriet were trying to pump you, and I was sorry. They

had no business to do such a thing—nor, for that matter, have I—but that's the way we all are, I'm afraid. The island is only two miles long and half a mile wide, and it seems impossible to live on it with any degree of privacy. I cannot understand why you came here to this nest of intrigue when you were looking for some desert island where Nicholas could paint in seclusion. But no matter! Here you are, and I'm glad to have you."

His reference to Harriet had brought him to his feet. The ferry was in all probability on its way home from Port Hard, and he wanted to make some ~~inroads~~ on the garden before his daughter came home and stopped him.

"Come!" he said to Edwina, "now that you've finished your tea I'd like to show you my delphiniums. They're especially fine this week."

Edwina said, as she followed him down the garden path: "You should have seen my lupines at Juniper Cottage. They were simply marvellous!"

"Really?" he exclaimed. "Don't tell me that garden is in bloom again!"

"Yes, it's wonderful. It was full of weeds and I pulled some of them out. By next summer I hope to have the whole garden thoroughly weeded so the flowers can grow."

"Next year!" he echoed. "So you're coming back to us, are you? Every one said you wouldn't stick it out more than six weeks—they said you'd get bored and move to Bar Harbour."

She shook her head. "I've never been quite so happy, so far from home. It frightens me, rather. I want to plant something in the garden at Juniper Cottage—something of my own. I have a feeling that if I do I'll come back next year and see it in bloom."

"That's a charming theory!" he exclaimed. "I shall have to give you some perennials. How would you like some of these delphiniums?"

The flowers in question were almost as tall as he was. He pointed to one of them with his cane and said: "My,

father planted that particular clump—they must be very nearly thirty years old. And these pinks came from my grandmother's house in Duxbury, Massachusetts."

Edwina commented upon the fact that many things were in bloom which flowered ordinarily a week or so apart; and he told her that this was a peculiarity of the coast of Maine, where the spring season was so tardy that spring and summer bloomed together. He began to snip off blooms here and there with a reckless disregard for Harriet's orders; no one was supposed to pick the flowers unless she gave them permission. But Harriet was still on the ocean, and he cut ruthlessly.

"There!" he said finally, with satisfaction, "these are for you, my dear."

Edwina looked at the mammoth bouquet in her arms and felt a little conscience-stricken. "Oh, but these are your very best flowers," she objected. "You shouldn't have picked them all for me."

"I wanted to," he said simply. "It has been many years since I gave a young and lovely woman a bouquet. Take them, my dear, with my compliments."

"You've been so kind," she murmured in a low voice. "I don't know why you should be so nice to me, a stranger. You've made me feel at home." Suddenly she was moved to tell him something. "The last ten years hasn't been all beer and skittles. I've been happy, but I've been lonely sometimes. This summer I'm not lonely, because every one has been so kind. And as for you . . . I feel as though I'd known you a long time, as though we were friends already. . . ."

He took her hand and held it in his a moment while he looked down into her eyes. "How very sweet you are," he murmured. "I can't tell you what a tonic this has been for me—I feel at least ten years younger. You must come and have tea with me again next week."

"You've made me very happy, too," she answered. "Good-bye, and thank you!"

When she had gone Mr. Heseltine murmured: "Yes

—but not happy enough. That's the trouble. *A bientôt, my dear!*" he added affectionately, but only the trees heard him.

CHAPTER XV

NICHOLAS was growing tired of painting winkles—his surrealism had not been very successful—and he was now in the mood to sketch the deserted lighthouse at the end of the island. Patsy Gayly had told him of its charms, and had described the view from the point in glowing terms—discounting the fact that the road to the lighthouse was the roughest one upon the island and that it took almost half an hour's walking in the broiling heat of a July sun to get there. Nicholas was fired with enthusiasm; and immediately planned a picnic which was to be limited to five people—himself, Patsy, Edwina, Linda, and Patsy's mother. "If we have more people than that," he explained, "the picnic will degenerate—like the usual Fiddler's Beach affair—into a debauch." Every one agreed with him there, because the last picnic on the island had been unusually rowdy. "We won't be able to paint if I ask any more people," he added to Linda, "and that is chiefly why I want to go to the lighthouse—the picnic is incidental." However, as he was something of a gourmet, he planned the lunch with care; they were to have lobster salad, roquefort sandwiches, and a bottle of Haute Sauterne. "Patsy," he added, "can have a hot dog and some ginger ale. She likes them better. This is *my* picnic, and I want everybody to be satisfied."

They started out in the middle of the morning for the lighthouse, Nicholas carrying the basket with the lunch and Linda the paintboxes and water bottles. The day was warm and clear, and the ocean was as smooth as a pane of green glass. Summer was at its zenith, and there was a voluptuous, golden enchantment cast like a spell over the island by the hot sun and the cloudless, windless sky

that made them all feel drowsy and contented. They walked slowly, enjoying the toasted smell of the hot woods, and the unmistakable, salty perfume of the water below them. From time to time the road wandered out of the woods and led them over pebbly beaches, lovely shores populated by gulls and sandpipers and fish hawks and frightened little animals who darted back into the woods at their approach with faint cries of dismay. The road to the lighthouse was the loneliest one on the island. Only picnickers came there now that the lighthouse was no longer in use. Edwina recaptured much of the eerie feeling she had had the first day she landed upon the island.

"It's *fey*," she said to herself. "We don't belong here. This world belongs to the gulls and the chipmunks and the wind."

Nicholas was struck with the same eeriness, only it had the effect upon him of making him extraordinarily happy and cheerful rather than detached or silent. The woods had never seemed so full of warmth and fragrance, and by the time they were half-way to the lighthouse he was drunk on the bouquet of the pine trees and the sea and the bayberry bushes along the shore. Linda's happiness was almost as apparent. The only reason she was not quite so ecstatic was the fact that, for her, the element of surprise was lacking in the journey to the lighthouse. She knew the road well because it led, among other places, to her favourite hide-out, Singing Beach, where she went whenever she needed privacy. Patsy chattered amiably and incessantly the entire way; she was the only one whose excitement was articulate. Linda interrupted her once to exclaim:

"I wish Mother were here! She adores this sort of picnic. It was stupid of her to go to Bar Harbour this week when the island is so divine."

Clarice Gayly asked Linda why she had not gone with her mother, because she had not yet been able to figure out why she had declined the invitation which included

a dance and a dinner for the young. Linda replied shortly that she couldn't be bothered to go. Clarice added: "I think you would have had a good time."

Linda muttered something about wanting to paint.

"You're getting 'insular,' as your grandfather would say," Clarice told her. "You'd better look out!"

"I can go to dances all winter," said Linda impatiently. "Why should I go to Bar Harbour for the pleasure of shagging with the college boys, when I can stay here and paint pictures, and have fun, and wear old clothes, and relax?"

Clarice reflected that Linda had changed her type with amazing rapidity that summer, but she did not say so out loud. She did say, however: "You wouldn't have talked that way last summer!"

"Well, I'm changing my spots, thank God!" said Linda grumpily, wishing that her Cousin Clarice would change the subject. It was so hard to explain to people why she had *not* gone to Bar Harbour. Harriet had looked at her suspiciously that morning and had said—fixing her with her eye—"Your grandfather cannot understand why you did not go to Bar Harbour with your mother. May Randolph was planning to give you a dinner before the dance, and you would have had a nice time." They all seemed to think that she was acting very strangely, when to her it was the simplest, and the most reasonable excuse that she could offer for not going to Bar Harbour; she wanted to stay home and paint. But when she said that, they all looked slightly incredulous, as though she had gone out of her head.

The fact that she was still in the amateur class, as a painter, prevented them from taking her seriously. This was beginning to get on her nerves, and if the Chadbournes had not been present she would have told her Cousin Clarice a few things which had been simmering in her mind for the last few days. As it was, she kept quiet and stalked along behind Nicholas without unburdening herself.

"It's further out here than I thought it was," said Edwina as they ploughed on through the woods. "How near are we to the lighthouse?"

"Tired, darling?" exclaimed Nicholas over his shoulder. "Shall we stop and rest a bit?"

"Oh, no! I'm not tired. I'm only surprised that the island is as long as this!"

"Pity we couldn't bring our bicycles," said Patsy. "I tried it once, but it was no use—the road's too rough. And in a minute, now, when we get to the point, there's no road at all—just oceans and oceans of blackberry vines. I should like to live out here! It's wonderful—you can see the whole coast for miles. Wouldn't you like to live out here, Mummy?"

"No!" replied Clarice emphatically. "It takes too long to get here. Imagine if you had to do this twice a day!"

"But if we lived here we'd have a nice road," objected Patsy, who was now fired with the idea of doing over the lighthouse and moving into it next summer, "and think of the fun of being out here all alone by ourselves!"

"The wind on the point is something fierce!" replied her mother unsympathetically. "It blows here when it's not blowing any place else. I can't stand wind. It drives me crazy. That's why I live on the lee side of the island—the ocean is all right, but for a steady diet give me the harbour."

"I've always wanted to live in a lighthouse," said her daughter with a note of pathos, "ever since I read *Pearl of Orr's Island*."

Linda agreed with her somewhat. It *would* be fun to live in the lighthouse miles away from everybody else. You'd have some privacy, and you could paint without having a mob of little children peering over your shoulder.

Patsy added: "If I lived here, I'd turn the lamps on again and run it like a real lighthouse, and get a horn like the one in Port Hard."

"Is that the one that sounds like a dejected cow?" asked Nicholas.

"No, that's Blue Head," Patsy told him with a giggle. "Oh-oh! I never thought of it before—it does sound like a cow!"

The woods dwindled away; and a moment later they straggled out into the field above the lighthouse. It was high noon and the sea below them was dancing with light; and the square white buildings and the round tower stood out in relief against the brilliant water. Although deserted for some time, the house was compact and tidy, and in the sunlight it looked like a cube of white chalk. "How clean it is!" exclaimed Nicholas. "I expected a broken-down ruin!"

"That's what I told you!" Patsy cried. "We could live in it to-morrow if we wanted to—just open the door and move in!"

"Look!" said Edwina, "there are the remains of a garden. The flowers are still blooming among the blackberry vines."

"It was a wonderful garden once. I remember it," said Linda. "We used to sail past it in the boat when I was a child. From the sea, it looked simply marvellous. Do you remember, Cousin Clarice, how lovely it was?"

"Oh, yes! it was a dream," agreed Clarice. "Do you suppose if I took that phlox home with me anybody'd care?"

"Nobody'd mind but the Coast Guard . . ."

"Well, I guess I'll help myself to it then," said Clarice. "I don't think they'd object."

There followed an argument between Patsy and her mother about swimming. Clarice maintained that the rocks below the lighthouse tower were steep and slippery, and that the tide was coming in and that Patsy would lose her foothold upon the rocks and come to grief if she tried to swim from there. "I absolutely forbid it!" she said firmly. "Look! the water's miles deep off those rocks—you can't even see the bottom."

Patsy was violently disappointed. She was hot and damp from the long walk through the woods, and added to that she had a new bathing suit purchased from a mail-order house and she wanted to have Nicholas and Edwina see her in it. "Oh, *gooey!*" she wailed. "I'm so hot and so sweaty! Oh, Mummy! why do you have to be so unreasonable? I've been looking forward to a swim all morning!"

"*No, Patsy!*"

All of them were hot and damp. Edwina was the only one who looked even faintly cool; but Edwina was sympathetic with Patsy, who was flushed and dishevelled with the extreme heat. "Can't we all go for a swim after lunch on the way home?" she asked. "Isn't there a beach on the way back that's safe and not too full of rocks?"

"There's Singing Beach," said Patsy, in a more hopeful tone of voice. "We could swim there, I guess."

"Let's do that, then!" said Edwina, giving her an encouraging smile. "Anyway, it's almost lunch time."

"Singing Beach," exclaimed Nicholas. "What a jolly name! We must bathe there by all means. It reminds me of Loreleis and Rhine Maidens. Fiddler's Beach sounds like—what you Americans call 'hey-heyy'! But Singing Beach sounds more æsthetic."

His general tone of voice was flippant, but the way he said "Singing Beach" gave Linda pause for thought. Those two words had been full of rhythm and feeling. The mere name had filled him with some inner excitement. "Wait until he *sees* Singing Beach!" she thought. "It's quite the loveliest beach on the island." Few people ever went there because it was out of the way, and its detachment from the rest of the island was one of its charms. You had to climb down a steep bank to get to it, and that also discouraged traffic.

"If we're going to swim after lunch," Nicholas was saying, "we must begin to paint right away. Come on, Linda! Stop dreaming and fetch me the water bottles."

Nicholas was intensely excited about the lighthouse;

he said that its square white planes were a relief after the convoluted forms of the winkles; and the austere, simple composition of the tower and the house against the blue sea appealed to him enormously. He started painting immediately, and became so absorbed in what he was doing that he was totally unconscious of time or the fact that the luncheon hour was approaching. Finally Edwina said to him mildly: "It's luncheon time, darling, and we're all hungry. Could you stop for a moment—or couldn't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so," he nodded. "I can go back to it after lunch."

"It's a pity to make you stop, but we're all *so* hungry!" she murmured.

"I know you are. I shall have to finish it while all the rest of you are bathing. Come! let's eat and get it over with."

Edwina came around behind him and looked at the picture on his knees. "Oh, darling!" she said, "that's better—much better! You've got something of your old vitality in it."

Nicholas frowned. "I'm afraid not. It doesn't quite jell."

"You're too critical."

"That's what Linda says."

"It's what I've always said," she reminded him. "If you only had a little more confidence in yourself you'd be able to paint with less trouble."

"It isn't confidence that I need. I don't know what it is . . . some unknown quantity. My painting lacks excitement," he added unhappily.

Edwina advised him to stop painting for a while and have lunch, saying that he would doubtless profit from the rest and relaxation. The lobster salad and the sauterne might stimulate him to do better things. Nicholas said absently, looking up at her with a bemused expression: "I suppose, if you hadn't been so confident in my abilities as a painter, after a year or so I'd have gone home

to Prince Setton and given up painting altogether. Some day, perhaps, I'll turn out something fairly decent, thanks to you. In fact, I'll have to, to justify all this mess."

"I'm happy," she affirmed positively. "I don't think it's such a mess."

"Yes, but you know you want a child. There's no use denying it. Your eyes are hungry."

Edwina remembered with a start of dismay that Mr. Heseltine had remarked the same thing about her, and she decided that she must be getting introspective and discontented if her hunger was that apparent to everybody. "What is it?" she thought disconsolately. "Has my subconscious longing for England betrayed me, or what? I *do* want a child, but that's not all I want."

Nicholas added disconcertingly: "You want a home too—in England—and it's only natural. This place is all right. It's jolly in a way, but it's not Prince Setton. Damn Gertrude, anyway!" he added with a burst of anger. "'Why the devil doesn't she go and get herself a lover?'"

"Don't bring up the subject of England to-day, please!" Edwina begged him. "In another moment you'll have ruined the picnic."

"I never dreamed that she'd stick it out this long! I thought, of course, that she'd give in after about three years of it. Otherwise, I might not have left Prince Setton so quickly and so easily."

"Gertrude," put in Edwina, "is three thousand miles away. Why not let her stay there for the present, anyway? I was having a good time on the picnic. And my hunger now is carnal, not spiritual. I want to have lunch."

"Sorry, darling!" said Nicholas penitently, with a glance at the sun over his head. "It is getting rather late in the day for lunch."

The sauterne was very choice, though a bit warm; and the lobster salad which Nicholas had made himself was unusually good. Everybody ate too much, and lay down afterwards in the shade of the lighthouse with sighs of

contentment. Even Patsy was subdued and drowsy. "How nice it is," she murmured, stretching herself out beside Nicholas, "to be out here alone like this, listening to the water and the gulls! It feels a million miles away from everything, doesn't it? Listen to the funny glugging sound the water makes down there on the rocks! And smell the grass! There must be some sweet grass around here, the kind the Indians make baskets out of. Would you like to live out here, Mr. Chadbourne? . . . would you?"

"No," thought Nicholas to himself, without answering her, "I wouldn't. I want to live in Prince Setton. I want to see it once more before the Germans drop bombs on it. I want to go home. . . ."

He turned his head with a little gesture of defeat and found Linda gazing at him with a peculiar expression. He stared back at her uncomfortably, wondering if by any chance she had divined his thoughts. She opened her mouth and repeated the question.

"Would you like to live here, Nicholas?"

"Possibly," he muttered uneasily. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I was hoping that you liked the island enough to stay here permanently. If you bought a house you'd come back again next summer. As it is now, you'll go away again and we won't ever see you." Then she added calmly: "I know what's the matter, of course. You'd prefer to live in England, really."

Edwina broke in upon them. She said hurriedly: "We hope to come back next year if there isn't a war. That would be the only thing that would keep us away, because Nicholas would have to go, of course. I've already told your grandfather that, with Mrs. Gayly's permission, I am going to do over the garden at Juniper Cottage and plant perennials. I have a superstition that if I start a garden I'll come back here and see it in bloom."

Nicholas thought to himself that if Edwina had planted some flowers in the garden at Prince Setton they might be

there now. Aloud he said teasingly: "Have you consulted your landlady about this? Maybe she doesn't want us to have the house next summer."

Clarice's voice rose sleepily from the other side of the group. "I'll give you the house free if you'll come back."

"That's very improvident of you, Mrs. Gayly!" said Nicholas. "You should raise the rent."

"The Flopsy Bunnies," remarked Patsy, "were 'very improvident,' and I've always wondered what it means."

"You'll have plenty of time to find out," said Nicholas. "Don't worry your little head over it now. Don't *think*, until you have to."

Patsy rolled over on her back and looked up at the sky with an exclamation of contentment: "Oh, gosh! isn't this picnic wonderful? Isn't it *fun*?"

"Yes," replied Nicholas, "but it isn't getting me anywhere. Come on, Linda! Let's get back to work."

"Aren't you going swimming?" Patsy cried in dismay.

"I'm afraid not. I must work before the light fades."

Patsy was disappointed, but resigned to the strange ways of artists who preferred slashing water on a piece of paper to swimming in it. She persuaded her mother to take her to Singing Beach on the way home so that Edwina, at least, would see her in her new satin-lastex bathing suit. When they had gone, Nicholas settled down to work. His picture troubled him because he could not seem to recapture his first vivid impression of the small, square white house against the blue sea. He had lost the clean austerity which had excited him so much before lunch. The lighthouse had become disenchanted. The sharp, clear outlines of the little white building with its fat tower eluded him, and when he tried to paint them the sharpness was gone. He was so quiet and so absorbed that Linda realized finally that something was wrong. She put away her materials and walked over to him. She looked over his shoulder for a moment without speaking, and then she said: "It isn't as good as it was before lunch. What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I had it—Edwina said so. But I've lost it again. It's—disenchanted!"

"Is that what you want?" mused Linda. "Enchantment? I wonder! Because if it is—if you think that will help—I might be able to find it for you again this afternoon."

"What do you mean by that cryptic statement?"

"I just mean that you may find it again on Singing Beach. You've never been there. It may 'get' you the way it gets some people—I don't know—shall we try, anyway?"

"How far is it?"

"It's on the way home."

"And I promised Patsy, didn't I?"

"Yes—but they may be gone by now. I'd like to have you see it. You may not get out this way again for days." She did not add: "And besides, I want to show it to you myself, the first time you go there."

"What time is it?"

"I think it must be about four o'clock."

"Then we'd still have time to paint before dinner, wouldn't we? Very well, then, if you think it's a good idea . . . I'm in the mood to do another sketch. I wish I hadn't had all that sauterne for lunch—possibly that did it."

"No, that wasn't it . . ." murmured Linda. Her voice was barely audible above the wash of the sea. "It's something else. I haven't figured it out, yet. Something's wrong, somewhere: You need more confidence in yourself. You're not as bad as you think you are. Perhaps I'm too critical about your pictures. Maybe I should give you more of a build-up. I shouldn't have said what I did just now—but you expect me to be hyper-critical because you haven't got any faith in your own abilities. You're like a house that's built on sand . . . and I can't see why!"

Her voice was full of emotion and quite unlike her usual breezy manner towards the problems of life. He looked

at her in surprise. She was dressed, as usual, in a white playsuit with childish sandals on her feet, and she had fastened a spray of pink phlox in her hair which gave her a look of artless seduction. But there was nothing immature in the way she was looking at him nor in the tone of her voice.

Up till then she had been a child—buoyant, unpredictable, and feckless. But he realized with something of a shock that she could be a woman when she chose.

"What are you looking at me that way for?" she exclaimed. "Have I got paint on my nose?"

Nicholas burst out laughing. "No, my dear!"

"Oh, what a joy you are!" he added spontaneously, with a chuckle.

"Why?"

"Because you are," he replied evasively. "The things you say are so unexpected."

"Unexpected? What do you mean?"

He did not answer her for a moment, and then he said bluntly: "If I had looked at most women like that they would have expected a kiss or at least a sentimental interlude. And all you wanted to know was whether you had paint on your nose. Keep it up, Linda—it's very charming. There aren't many like you."

"I'm not as innocent as all that," she told him calmly. "If you had been nearer my age I would have expected you to make a pass at me, or something."

"Some of your American slang is so indelicate!" protested Nicholas. "'Make a pass at me'! It sounds like a prize fight, not a love affair."

"I wasn't talking about love. I was talking about something else again. . . ."

Nicholas looked at her again with a thoughtful stare. Finally he said: "Have you really found out the difference between love and 'something else again,' as you call it? You seem so terribly young . . . you're only a child still."

"Well, to be quite honest with you, I don't think I've

ever been in love—not passionately, at any rate. But I know plenty about the other sort of thing. I've been out two years."

Nicholas shook his head. "Don't say that! You've got a look about you that's as innocent as a lamb in February. You've got a white, scrubbed look . . . you're only a child! You may think you know a lot, but you don't. Your eyes are too clear, and too serene."

His voice sounded so agitated that she said: "I'm a 'good girl,' if that's what's worrying you."

"I can see that," replied Nicholas grimly. "Come along, my dear! This is no sort of a conversation for you and me to be having out here all alone! Show me the way to Singing Beach."

Linda moved off obediently across the sunny field. Still pondering, Nicholas followed her. He was so absorbed in the passage of her brown legs through the grass ahead of him that he did not look back to see if he had left anything behind. His face was clouded with thought. He was so quiet that Linda turned back once or twice to see if he was still there. She was on the point of asking him why he was so abstracted but thought better of it. "I've said something wrong," she concluded unhappily. "I shouldn't have talked about sex."

The path diverged to the right, along the sea. The pine trees were so thick that there was very little underbrush, and the churchly atmosphere in which they found themselves was dark and cool after the hot brilliance of the field they had left behind them. Ahead of them, through the serried trunks of the trees, could be seen the blue glimmer of the Atlantic. "We'll be there in a moment now," she told him. "Singing Beach is straight ahead of us, under the cliff."

"It's rather wonderful in here, isn't it?" he remarked, looking at the ceiling of boughs over his head. "Why have I never been to Singing Beach before?"

"Most people think it's too far to come for a swim, and the beach isn't large enough for the usual Camel Island

picnic. I suppose I'm the only one who comes here very often."

"What do you come here for?" he asked.

"Oh, I like to get away from the crowd on Fiddler's Beach sometimes. There's a twisted pine on a rock above the beach here that's rather nice to paint. And no one bothers me."

"I don't hear any voices now, do you? I suppose the others have had their swim and gone home."

Linda was glad. They would not have to listen to Patsy's endless chatter, and they could sketch in peace.

The path melted suddenly under their feet. It coursed like a waterfall over the edge of the cliff and tumbled down to the sea at a perilous angle between large yellow boulders. Linda disappeared between them and called back to him after a moment from the beach: "Come on, Nicholas! It isn't as perilous as it looks." Her voice echoed among the rocks, and when Nicholas caught up with her he commented upon the fact. "That's why it's called 'Singing Beach,'" she answered. "The wind and the waves echo down here too. It's like a huge shell. I don't know why—no one's ever been able to explain it."

He listened. He could hear the lapping of the water and the sound of the afternoon wind in the pines high above them, but aside from that it was the quietest place he had ever known. Also, it was like being at the heart of some great conch shell; the sound of the wind echoing among the rocks was so eerie that it gave the effect of stillness rather than of motion. It was lonelier than any spot he had ever found outside of Dartmoor. However, its loneliness was not repellent. It was bright and warm down there among the rocks, as though Singing Beach had trapped the golden afternoon. Linda watched its spell working upon him. She had been half afraid that he would see it only as another beach. He said: "This is by far the best part of the island! Why have you never brought me here before?"

"Well," she hesitated, "I wasn't sure you'd like it.

I don't bring every one here. Lots of people don't think it has any charm. To them it's just another beach. . . . I was afraid you might not like it either."

"How silly of you!"

Their eyes met. Linda blushed faintly, and he could not imagine why he was vaguely uncomfortable, but he was. He was trying to think of some remark which would not sound too emotional when she said darkly: "I don't know what it is—but I think there's something eerie about this place! Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, my dear," he nodded, "I'm afraid I see exactly what you mean."

"The light is fading," she said in a more normal voice, "hadn't we better get to work?"

Nicholas sat down with his back to the cliff and began to sketch the rocks and the water in front of him. Linda wandered indecisively over the beach and came to rest finally within view of the stunted pine on the cliff. She was so absorbed in what she was doing that she was totally unconscious of the fact that she had put herself in his direct line of vision. He was on the point of saying: "Linda! you're right in the middle of my foreground!" when it occurred to him that he had not painted a figure for several weeks. The idea appealed to him, so he let her stay where she was. The golden afternoon spilled around them, over the trees and the rocks and the sea. The light mellowed as the sun went down and the colour of the water changed. The afternoon wind was teasing and erratic; it shimmered across the glassy ocean in little puffs and flurries as though some invisible water nymph had breathed upon it. The enchantment deepened, and a vague inner excitement began to possess Nicholas. He was painting rapidly and easily, and his face had lost all of the strained, unhappy expression it had worn earlier in the day. Linda realized that she must not interrupt him, although she needed help with her own sketch. "He's got it at last!" she thought to herself as she watched him. "He's painting really well, and it's all thanks to me because I brought him here."

He had taken off his hat, and the wind that ruffled the ocean was stirring in his hair. The little puffs and flurries made his locks as rough and untidy as a boy's. The thought crossed her mind that it would be nice to smooth it back again, to feel its roughness under her hand. If Laurie had been sitting there she would have passed her hand over his hair without a qualm, but it was Nicholas whose hair she wanted to rearrange, so her hands remained well under control in her lap. She looked at him deeply, thinking: "He's younger to-day, somehow! His face hasn't got any lines in it. He looks almost happy. I never realized it before, but he's very handsome. He must have been divine ten years ago, when Edwina married him. He's wonderful now, really. . . . I like that little bump on the bridge of his nose. And I like the way his mouth curls when's he's thinking. . . . He looks awfully aristocratic. He's got what the French call '*race*.' . . . How grey his hair is above his temples! He must be over forty though he doesn't act it. Edwina's thirty-two—she told me so—and I'm twenty. . . . There's a long gap between us—between Nicholas and me. . . . but I almost forgot it just now when I wanted to run my hands through his hair. He seems younger to-day. . . ."

He glanced up at her over the top of his sketching block, and their eyes held. Neither of them spoke. From the ocean came the rasping cries of a flock of gulls who were waiting to scavenge the beach for possible crumbs of food after they had left; and from the bayberry bushes on the cliff came the hum of wild bees and the chirps of little birds. The shadows were growing long and blue, and the sweet fragrance of evening was already in the air. The day was dying gracefully all around them; in a little while, now, the bees would have ceased their humming, and the birds would have found a night's haven somewhere among the trees. But neither of them was aware of the passage of time, or of what was going on around them. Finally Nicholas said: "What's the matter? Why were you looking at me that way . . .?"

"I wanted to run my hands through your hair," replied the girl with a wavering smile. "I thought it would be such fun!"

She waited for him to say something equally stupid, but he made no reply. Finally—after æons of time—he moved. Out of the corner of her eye she could see that he was hunting for something. "What is it, Nicholas?" she inquired. "What have you lost?"

"My cigarettes," he mumbled. "Damn! I must have left the whole kit bag behind at the lighthouse. I shall have to go back," he added after a moment. "You wait here!"

"No," she exclaimed with a shake of her head, "I'll go. I want you to keep on painting. You're doing beautifully. You mustn't spoil his picture." He protested as she stumbled to her feet and crossed the beach in front of him, but she shook her head again with more emphasis, and climbed the bank. "Good-bye!" she called flipantly. "I'll be seeing you!"

Before he could say anything more she was gone, up the cliff and into the woods. Her impulse was to run and hurry back again to the beach she had left behind her; but after her first mad plunge through the pine grove on top of the cliff she controlled her haste. Her long legs slowed down into a walk, but her heart continued to pound and flutter in her chest like a bird caught in a net. She put her hand on her throat with a gesture of alarm—had she run too fast up the cliff, or what?

What was the matter with her?

She came to a full stop at the edge of the woods, still clutching her throat. Her face was deadly pale, although the blood was coursing through her veins, and her eyes were bright with alarm. There was no one within view but a wheeling gull, and her hand moved down to her side where her heart was supposed to be. A wild thought came into her mind, and she tried to push it away: "No! no! no!"

Oh, no; it couldn't be that—it couldn't—it simply couldn't.

She stumbled on across the blackberry vines and reached the lighthouse. The kit bag was lying where Nicholas had left it on the grass beside the tower. She sat down abruptly, with the canvas bag in her hands, and stared out to sea. A faint but unmistakable scent—of Johann Maria Farina and Virginia tobacco and Harris tweed—the smell of Nicholas—rose from the kit bag. Unconscious of what she was doing she picked it up in her arms and laid her cheek against it. No one saw her but the gull, who came to rest for a moment on the tower of the lighthouse and looked down at her speculatively.

The smell of tobacco reminded her that Nicholas was waiting for his cigarettes. But she did not want to go back to him until she felt a little more composed. She was still fluttery around the chest and her knees were weak. She could not face the trip back through the woods until she had rested a moment and smoked one of Nicholas's cigarettes. She opened the kit bag and peered into the hodgepodge of tobacco tins, folding picnic spoons, soap, pencils, and other oddments, which Nicholas carried with him on all his painting expeditions. Among them she found a gold cigarette case. Much to her surprise, there was a coronet on the front of it. There were no strawberry leaves, so it couldn't have belonged to a duke. . . . She wondered where Nicholas had acquired it.

There were only two cigarettes left. Under them were some words written in a feminine hand: *Nicholas from Gertrude, December fifteenth, nineteen hundred and eighteen.*

CHAPTER XVI

THE shadows were creeping along the beach. In another half-hour it would be too dark to paint. Nicholas looked up from his work and wondered where Linda was. He had been so absorbed in what he was doing that he had forgotten her. "She's taking a jolly long time!" he thought to himself uneasily. "I wonder if I should go after her?" The wind had died again and the sea was full of pinks and greens and lavenders shot with gold. The picture in front of him, however, remained as an imperishable reminder of the day which was about to die. It was blue and intense, and full of rich mellow sunlight, and the shadows in it were correspondingly sharp and deep; and the rocks he had painted were made of solid, amber-coloured stone. In a few happily placed strokes of water colour, Nicholas had recaptured the very essence of summer on the coast of Maine. He knew that it was good—it was the best thing he had done in years.

Hearing a sound on the rocks above him, he turned and looked up. "Well!" he exclaimed, "you've taken long enough to find that kit bag! Where was it?"

"Oh," replied Linda casually in an odd voice, "I found it all right. It was lying beside the lighthouse. . . ."

"I was worried about you, you took so long!"

"I stopped to have a cigarette."

"Oh!" said Nicholas cautiously, "so you found my cigarette case, did you? Were there any cigarettes left in it?"

"Only two. I'm sorry, but I just had to smoke one of them. . . . I hope you don't mind."

"No, I don't mind. You look rather pale. What's the matter?"

"I don't know . . . indigestion, I suppose."

"We'd better go home then," he said promptly, on a note of alarm. "Bicarbonate of soda will fix you up."

"No! no!" she protested hurriedly, unwilling to leave the magical beach below her, "we can't go yet! That is, not until you've finished your picture."

"It is finished," he told her.

At that she came hopping swiftly downward through the boulders and peered down over his shoulder. After a minute of silence, during which he was torn with doubt, she exclaimed, "Oh, Nicholas!" in a voice which made his spirits rise again.

"Do you like it really?" he asked hopefully.

"That's a dumb question!"

"Then you think it's good?"

Without answering him she put her hand on his shoulder. It was an unpremeditated gesture, and she realized too late that she should not have touched him. Almost automatically his own hand came up and held hers in a warm, penetrating clasp. The soft, unfamiliar contact of his warm flesh gave her a terrible, floating sensation. She steadied her nerves by staring fixedly at the painting in front of her. "It is to-day," she murmured at last. "You've got the whole thing—the sea with the little goose-pimples on it—the bright sunshine—the chrome yellow rocks—even the phlox in my hair! My legs aren't as pretty as that—I'm afraid you've rather idealized me—my hair isn't quite that tidy! But you've got the stillness of the beach, and the lapping of the water—you've almost caught the echo of the sea among the rocks!"

"Have I?"

"Yes, absolutely. . . . Why did you put me in the foreground? Why didn't you tell me to move?"

"I don't know. You looked so nice sitting there with your hair falling forward across your cheeks, and your brown legs had a lovely line to them . . . also," he added half to himself. "I put you in because you're so much a part of all this."

Linda's heart gave a disturbing twitch.

Nicholas went on dreamily: "I don't know what hap-

pened to me to-day. But from the moment I started this picture everything went 'without a hitch'! I can't imagine what did it—possibly it was the sauterne we had at lunch."

"You blamed that earlier in the afternoon," she managed to say fairly casually, although her heart was going at a mad rate.

"I know I did. But perhaps I was wrong. It must have been the sauterne. I haven't had any other stimulants."

"You've had the sky and the sea and Singing Beach."

"And you, my dear. You forget yourself."

"Me?"

"Yes, *you*! Don't sound so surprised. Why wouldn't I enjoy painting you?" he added with a disarming smile.

"You're a very nicely built young woman." His voice was cheerfully impersonal, and as a result her heart stopped most of its wild fluttering.

She looked out to sea blindly, with an unreasonable sense of failure. There was nothing there, obviously, beyond the simple fact that he had wanted to paint a woman—any woman—that afternoon. His stimulation had come, not from herself, but from the quiet murmuration of the sea and the tawny rocks and the fragrance in the summer air. She did not know whether to be profoundly upset or tremendously relieved. Both emotions were rampant in her breast. Her mind was so confused that she could not speak to him. She was becoming more and more conscious of the warm pressure of his hand; and with a sudden gesture of independence she removed herself almost wildly from his grasp and walked down to the edge of the water. During the last few minutes the sea had changed to aquamarine blue. The late afternoon was growing even more magical than the day had been. The shadows under the rocks were a deep, luscious purple, the colour of vintage burgundy. A belated sparrow was singing in the pine grove, possibly in anticipation of the moon. . . . Beauty which made you "ache

and sag"—beauty like this—was unsafe. And yet she could not leave. She knew instinctively that Singing Beach would never have the same enchantment again. At that hour it had reached its pinnacle of witchery and loveliness.

Nicholas rose and joined her. He kicked some pebbles into the water with his toe, but did not speak to her. His eyes—had she trusted herself to look at him—were glazed with thought, and his face was a trifle pale. Dusk was falling rapidly now. The cocktail hour was approaching, and both of them were due at the Big House. But Nicholas did not suggest going. Finally he said to her, still nudging pebbles into the water with a distracted air and not looking at her: "Linda, we've had a lovely day. We've been terribly happy—at least I have. This beach, as you say, has a sort of enchantment about it."

"Glad you like it," she mumbled ineptly.

"I think I know what got into me this afternoon," he added disturbingly. "I'm afraid I know why I painted such a damn' good picture. It's a pity, because . . . it can't happen again. We'll have to stick to places on the island which are less enchanted. You know what I mean . . . we mustn't come out here again."

"No, I suppose not," she agreed, giving him a look.

Nicholas struggled hard to remember that he was over twenty years her senior and that he was going grey around the temples. He tried to remember a lot of things, Edwina and Gertrude among them, and failed utterly. All that he could remember was the way she had looked at him just now, like a rabbit he had once shot and failed to kill.

"Enchantment," he added a little mournfully, "is very dangerous."

"But lovely!"

Her voice throbbed in the cool evening air. He said to her in a lighter tone of voice, struggling for composure: "In just a moment, now, that bird up there is going to

sing again. I think we'd better leave before that happens. We're not in the right mood for nightingales."

Linda looked at him ruefully. "I could do without them," she said.

CHAPTER XVII

"You'd better send Sam after them," advised Harriet bluntly.

"Oh, let's wait a while longer," returned Mr. Heseltine tranquilly. "I don't think anything terrible has happened to them."

Harriet said nothing further; but her eyes were deep with unspoken apprehension. She began pouring vermouth into a shaker full of rye, and her hand trembled a little. Mr. Heseltine said to her after a moment: "I don't see why you're so upset! If Mrs. Chadbourne isn't worried, I don't see why you should be."

Harriet closed her mouth firmly. From the garden came the sound of feminine voices where Edwina, Maribel and Clarice were discussing the merits and demerits of certain perennials. Edwina's voice sounded gay and unconcerned. "You see!" nodded Mr. Heseltine, "she's not upset at all!"

Harriet said tersely: "It would have been better if Linda had gone to Bar Harbour with her mother."

"Stop talking in cryptograms."

"Think it over," she returned briefly. "And don't blame me if the worst happens. If I'd had my way I'd have sent after them half an hour ago."

"I don't know what you're driving at," said Mr. Heseltine amiably, "but whatever it is, I'm quite sure you're wrong."

Harriet gave a snort of annoyance and banged through the screen door in search of the other women. Mr. Heseltine watched her go with a chuckle. He had a fairly

good idea of what was in her mind, but he had no intention of letting her unburden herself.

Edwina came into the room ahead of the others; and at the sight of her his heart gave a pleasant throb. Her eyes were the colour of the sea below the hill—a deep aquamarine. They were also as calm and as unruffled.
“Ah! there you are, my dear!” he murmured, relieved.

Edwina smiled at him happily. “I’ve had such a lovely day! We all went to the lighthouse.”

“So I hear by the grapevine system. Patsy tells me that you had a bacchanalian feast.”

“Sauterne and lobster salad. We ate too much. I was absolutely sodden with sleep as a result, but Patsy wanted to go for a swim, so we went to Singing Beach.”

As she lit a cigarette she added: “Linda and Nicholas were supposed to meet us there, but they never turned up. I can’t imagine where they are.”

“Would you like me to send someone after them?”

“Oh, no, don’t bother!” she said easily. “They’ll turn up after a while, I expect.” There was not the faintest trace of alarm, or of annoyance, in the level tones of her voice; and Mr. Heseltine wondered whether, as an old man, he could say anything to her before Harriet made some tactless remark and destroyed her equanimity. Then he decided that it was better to keep quiet—say nothing to Edwina—and try to persuade Harriet to mind her own business—a difficult job, but incumbent upon him as guardian of the peace of the island.

As she drifted around the room in search of an ash tray Edwina remarked: “Nicholas is impossible when he’s out painting. He loses all sense of time unless I go with him.”

This was a good opening, and Mr. Heseltine availed himself of it. He said quickly: “I’d go with him after this, if I were you. Linda’s almost as bad. She has no sense of time at all—never had.”

“Oh, I don’t mind how unpunctual he is—I’m used to it. However, I do mind when he upsets other people.

I'm afraid he's being very rude to you this evening, but I suppose he found something that he wanted to paint, and he had to stay until it was finished. You know what painters are. . . ."

It was on the tip of his tongue to say: "Yes!—but Harriet doesn't know what painters are!" when the door reopened and the other three women entered.

Harriet looked at Edwina and said pointedly: "No sign of them yet!"

"Well, I'm not going to worry about them," returned Edwina, "they're not in any danger as far as I can see. What could happen to them? The island is so small they can't get lost. I've seen Nicholas act this way often. It's annoying, but, as I was saying to Mr. Heseltine, painters are like that."

Harriet folded her lips, and said nothing further. Maribel said: "Perhaps they've gone to Singing Beach. Linda goes there all the time."

"Why, yes," said Edwina, "that's perfectly possible. We stopped there on the way home—lovely, isn't it?"

"The Indians," said Harriet, raising her voice above the rattle of the cocktail shaker in her hand, "the Indians had a legend about Singing Beach. They claimed that the echo was the spirit of an Abnaki princess who died of a broken heart—she was in love with a man who wouldn't have her, or something. At any rate, they said that the place had a spell on it. When I was a child I wouldn't go there, it gave me the creeps. The damn' place is rather eerie!"

"Harriet! You do know the most extraordinary things!" protested her father. "Where in the world did you pick that up?"

"Oh, all the lobstermen know it. They have a theory that if you take your girl out there she'll give in without much argument—I mean," hastily, "she'll fall in love with you and marry you."

"Nonsense!" said her father with startling vigour. "I never heard such tripe."

Harriet went on relentlessly. "The old maids in Port Hard have the idea that if they picnic on Singing Beach they'll be married within the year. The echo in those rocks is supposed to be very seductive. It's conducive to romance, I'm told."

Clarice, who knew exactly what was in Harriet's mind, lost no time in saying to her: "Pity you didn't go there yourself, Hattie! Or maybe you did, and the spell didn't work."

"Girls! girls!" protested Mr. Heseltine again. He said to Edwina: "Shall we go to Singing Beach to-morrow? I'd like a little romance at my time of life, and it would give the island something to talk about. We seem to be very low on conversation."

Edwina, who was comfortably unaware of the battle going on over her head, replied: "That would be fun! We'll have a picnic there to-morrow if it doesn't rain."

"If it rains to-morrow," added Mr. Heseltine, "I am going to send you down some plants. I've already picked them out. You're getting some phlox and Rosa rugosas. And some of those old-fashioned pinks that smell of cinnamon. And valerian. And probably some iris. . . ." The conversation became safely general. Mr. Heseltine and Edwina discussed fertilizers after that; and Clarice and Maribel discussed the servant problem on the island, which was—as usual—acute. Harriet was deep in a mail-order catalogue, but from time to time she would look up with a brooding expression, her eyes watching the front door. Once her sharp ears caught the sound of footsteps; but it turned out to be Julie Channing.

"Hallo, Harriet!" said Julie cheerfully. Her dark eyes swept the room, and she added, "Where's Linda?"

"That's what I'd like to know," replied Harriet tartly. "It's a quarter-past seven."

"Did she go out in that boat of hers?"

"No, thank Heaven! If she was out in that I'd know she was drowned. She went to the lighthouse."

"Who with?" said Julie perfectly innocently.

Harriet shot her a veiled glance; but Julie's eyes were as bland as a summer sea. So Harriet answered briefly: "Nicholas Chadbourne."

Before Julie could make any comment, however, Harriet exclaimed rapidly: "What's your news? Heard from that boy of yours this week?"

"I had a letter from him this morning," replied Julie evasively. She had no desire to discuss her son's affairs with Harriet. She added, with a grin: "Those two—Nicholas and Linda—are the damnedest pair! Imagine spending all that time painting pictures! *I* couldn't. But then, I suppose *I* haven't got the urge. There must be some fascination in it."

"Naturally!" said Harriet crisply.

"Do you suppose she'll stick to it?"

"How do I know? She's unpredictable. You never know what she'll do next. I think this craze she's got now is all nonsense. We've never had an artist in the family."

"Here they come now!" added Julie, glancing out of the window. "Look at the two of them! Laden down with masterpieces!"

Edwina rose and looked, and so did Mr. Heseltine.

Nicholas was walking up the path a few steps ahead of Linda. He had a wooden paintbox under one arm, and a big sketch book under the other. In the golden evening light his face looked absorbed and pensive. Trailing after him, Linda looked tired and unusually mature. She was carrying two empty bottles with screw tops which had once contained water, and around her neck was slung a canvas kit bag. At sight of them, Julie exclaimed: "They haven't the foggiest notion of what's going on around them, have they? It must be divine to get so wrapped up in a thing, like that. They look half dead and utterly happy."

Edwina said: "I can tell by looking at Nicholas that he's painted something rather good." There was a dreamy, enchanted expression on his face which she knew

very well and which she had not seen him wear for months. "It must have been the effects of Singing Beach," she added. "I can see that it has put a spell on him."

Harriet was mixing up another round of cocktails; and her hand trembled so that she spilled vermouth on the floor.

"A spell—yes! But not the kind Edwina—poor Edwina—meant," she thought to herself.

Nicholas came through the door, and his eyes roved around the room in search of Edwina. Their eyes met and clung; and much to her surprise he came over to her and kissed her in front of every one—a thing which he never did ordinarily because he was undemonstrative and painfully reserved about his feelings for her. Edwina wondered a little at his sudden warmth; and she said to him: "Oh, darling; you look as though you'd painted a masterpiece! Have you?"

"I hope so," he answered. "At any rate, it's the best thing I've done in months."

"Do let's see it!" chorused the room.

"It's only a sketch, you understand," he said to them. "I'm going to do another one in oils."

He pulled a chair forward into the lamplight, and propped the open sketch book upon it. His voice was vibrant with excitement, and his lean face was a little flushed. He was obviously pleased with what he had done, and he was being frank about it, with the candour of the professional artist. He infected them all with his enthusiasm, and they crowded around him eagerly—all but Linda, who was drinking quietly by herself in the shadows at the farther end of the room.

"Golly!" murmured Julie, with a long sigh of appreciation, "that's something!"

Clarice added: "It's Singing Beach," all right!"

"And it's Linda!" exclaimed Mr. Heseltine on a note of mingled delight and astonishment.

It was Linda—without question.

There she sat, with her long hair falling forward over

her cheeks and her brown legs gleaming in the sunlight, and some pink flowers over one ear. Her face was totally absorbed in what she was doing. She had a paint brush in one hand, and a block of water-colour paper on her knees. Behind her in the bright sky hovered a single gull, providing a needed accent in an otherwise flawless sky. The sea behind her was a deep, electric blue, and the air was full of lambent sunshine. "Well!" murmured Clarice finally, "it's perfectly marvellous! You've got —seersucker playsuit and everything!"

"Now that you've got her," added someone with an attempted witticism, "what are you going to do with her?"

"I'm going to send her to the Academy," replied Nicholas with a grin, looking at Edwina.

"No, you won't!" objected Linda flatly, "not dressed like that! If you're going to paint my portrait for the Academy you've got to paint me in something decent—not a seersucker playsuit!"

"Don't be such a Philistine!" cried her grandfather. "That's perfect nonsense."

Nicholas said to her, hunting for her eyes through the murk at the other end of the room: "I would like to paint you as Nephretiti, with your head tipped forward on that swanlike neck of yours—but I mustn't. I came here to paint the coast of Maine, not beautiful girls. From now on I'm going to work very hard—no more picnics, no more jaunts to the lighthouse, no more cocktail parties!"

"And no more lessons for me," thought Linda unhappily reading between the lines. . . . Fortunately it was dark over there in the corner, and no one could guess how her heart failed in her breast, and how all the light in the world seemed to die.

Nicholas added, turning back to the others: "I've got it now—or at least I think I have. I've recaptured something I'd lost entirely."

"What?" said Julie with interest.

"Vitality. Energy. I don't know exactly what you'd call it. Anyway, I can paint again."

Harriet looked at him stonily. Her eyes were cold and practical. "Do you think," she said to him, "that you'll be able to paint as well to-morrow—when you're *not* on Singing Beach?"

"Yes, why shouldn't I?"

They looked at each other over the top of the picture; and there was a subtle antagonism in the air between them—imperceptible to the rest of the room but there nevertheless. "Why not?" repeated Nicholas lightly but cautiously.

Harriet gave a mirthless grunt. "There's a spell on that place," she told him. "You'd better look out!"

"Phooey!" said Linda from the shadows, "phooey, phooey, phooey!" Much to every one's surprise she refused a second cocktail and went out into the night, letting the screen door bang in her wake.

"Now what's the matter with her?" asked Julie, preparing to follow her. "What was all that about?"

"She's tired, I suppose," said her grandfather hastily, concealing his own surprise under a bland expression. "She's had a long day of it. Leave her alone, Julie!"

"I suppose I'd better," said Julie slowly, sinking down again beside him. ". . . I wanted to talk to her, but I'll leave it until morning. I had some news for her."

"From Laurie?"

"Yes. He's coming back at the end of the week."

Mr. Heseltine settled more comfortably into the sofa. "That's nice! They can play tennis together. Linda's been painting too hard—she needs exercise."

CHAPTER XVIII

DURING the night the sky filled with damp, heavy clouds. When Edwina went out into the garden at ten in the morning, the lowering sky had begun to send off a cloying, sodden haze—half mist and half rain. It lay on the partly wild garden like a white hoar frost, glazing each leaf with myriad silver drops of moisture. The sea was grey, the horizon a vague demarcation between the water and the heavy sky. A light wind was blowing up the coast; and it seemed fresh and cool and rather welcome after the brilliant heat of the day before. Edwina knelt down on the ground and took up her trowel. Peace began to flood her mind. The soft, friable earth spilled through her fingers with a familiar sensation, once loved and lost for many summers. In her pleasure she was able to forget for a moment that this garden did not belong to her, that she had no claim to the rich, brown loam under her knees. Her mind drifted ahead—as gardeners minds always do—and she saw the garden as it would be the following summer, tidy and filled with colour. And with a smile she began to work in earnest.

Nicholas came out of the house with the announcement that he was going to Rockland. She sat back on her heels and looked at him speculatively. He had slept rather badly, and she wondered if she ought to let him go. "I want a change," he said. "I haven't been off the island for three weeks, and I'm getting 'insular.'" Edwina offered to go with him—in fact she put down her trowel and started to rise to her feet—but Nicholas waved her down again. "Stay where you are," he said. "Mr. Heseltine is sending you down some plants this morning—he told me so last night. You'd better stay here and put them in—they'll fade otherwise."

"Must you go?" she murmured.

"I have to go," was his answer. "I'm running out of zinc white."

"Seems rather a long trip, for a tube of paint," she murmured, picking up her trowel again.

"I don't trust any one with the errand—they're sure to buy the wrong kind."

"Is zinc white so very important? Can't you stick to water colours until to-morrow? And then we'll both go."

"No. If it's clear to-morrow I want to start my big picture of Singing Beach—I mustn't let it go while the mood is still on me."

"Is it still on you?"

"Yes, very much. Why?"

"I don't know . . . you looked tired and green this morning, I thought. You've lost that enchanted look you had last night."

"Oh!—so I was 'enchanted,' was I?" he murmured uneasily.

"Yes . . . I haven't seen you look that way in months. Years. Not since we were in Taormina."

Nicholas said: "Singing Beach is really the oddest place. As Miss Heseltine so aptly described it, the beach has a 'spell' on it. Didn't you feel it when you were there? The beauty of it made me realize why Ulysses came to grief on so many beaches."

"Did you—come to grief?"

Nicholas said a little sharply, "What do you mean?"

Her hands played around in the soil for a moment, and her cheeks coloured faintly. "I meant—did you come to grief on the beach in Taormina?"

Nicholas veiled his relief with an exclamation: "Of course not, you idiot!"

Edwina rose to her feet and twined her arms around him. "Kiss me, Nicholas!" she murmured, looking up into his eyes with an uncertain smile.

"Didn't I love you enough last night?" he asked her teasingly, holding her close to him.

"Yes . . . but I want something else, now."

"What, for instance?"

"I don't know, exactly . . . I suppose what I want is the feeling we had in Taormina."

"Didn't you get any enchantment yesterday on Singing Beach?" he asked her not very intelligently, brushing her hair with his lips and looking steadily over her head at the grey sea.

"No, I didn't, because you weren't there . . . I kept waiting for you to come and enjoy it with me, and you never turned up."

That was the only time she had mentioned his defection. Nicholas said evenly, still avoiding her eyes, "I'm sorry, darling! It was fearfully rude of me, I know. But I got involved at the lighthouse. The square little building fascinated me, and I couldn't paint it at all. I couldn't paint a thing yesterday until Linda suggested moving on to Singing Beach. She said that it was full of charm. By the time we arrived you'd gone. But I didn't follow you home because the beach was—lovely. I wanted to paint it—I *had* to paint it. You know," he added, giving Edwina another kiss on the top of her head, "that child is so frightfully keen that her enthusiasm is very infectious."

"Is it?"

"Yes, absolutely! She's so positive that I'm a great artist, that when I'm out with her I almost feel I am. Enthusiasm! Only the young have it, I'm afraid. It's very stimulating."

"Oh, yes!" said Edwina vaguely.

Nicholas added: "I thought when I came here that she was empty-headed, and rather typical of a certain type of American girl. But she's not. She's got a nice head on her shoulders."

Edwina wondered why he was bringing up the subject of Linda with such vigour. She replied: "I'm terribly glad you had such a successful day—if Linda's responsible, I'm delighted. Anything to make you paint again."

Nicholas looked warily down into her eyes. They were as clear and as pellucid as a trout pool, and there was

nothing mirrored in them but the reflection of his own blond head. He gathered her into his arms, and looked over her head at the sea, saying nothing. He saw himself in another garden, long ago, with Edwina in his arms. How much had come from that moment of ecstasy—how many years of exile! He felt bitterly sorry for her at that moment, and if he had been sure that he would not betray himself he would have told her so.

Edwina slid out of his arms and knelt down again beside the fallen trowel. "You'd better go now," she said, "or you'll miss the ferry. I heard it blowing just now. That means it will leave in fifteen minutes. I still think you're silly to take that long trip to Rockland."

"But I must!" repeated Nicholas stubbornly, although he would not tell her why. Some deep-seated fear was driving him across the water.

With a shrug Edwina said: "Oh, very well. Buy me a pound of butter for the lobsters to-night, and any green vegetables you can find—peas, if they're not too expensive. Also, I need some bone meal for the garden."

Nicholas said to her grimly as he watched her turning up the dark loam with her trowel: "I can't see what you're doing that for. It seems to me that you're putting a lot of work into a rented garden. I don't see why you bother."

"I've got a superstition about it—I told you that," she answered. "I want to come back here next summer and see the garden in bloom. But even if I don't come back," she added philosophically, "I've had all the fun of doing it."

"... 'And though his eyes may never know, How lavishly his flower blow, Others will stand and musing say, "These were the flowers he sowed that May.''"

"What's that?"

"Poem by V. Sackville-West called 'The Land.'"

"Don't forget the mail," she added as he turned and stared away up the hill. "There was a boat in on Monday, and I'm expecting a letter from Evelyn."

He flung back something about her sister Evelyn which she failed to catch, and disappeared into the woods. The clouds lifted a trifle as she worked, and the wind blew them apart for a moment, revealing a watery sun. The pale yellow sunshine and the scudding clouds reminded her of England, and she sighed involuntarily.

Around noon she caught the sound of the buckboard coming downhill through the woods. When the long cart appeared it was filled to the brim with plants; and when Edwina saw them she looked slightly aghast. "Heavens!" she said, "all that for me?"

"Yes, *ma'am*," replied Sam, adding: "Mr. Heseltine said I was to stay and help you put 'em in." When she protested he said: "There's more plants here than you can handle alone. I didn't know we had so many left over, but it seems we have."

He climbed off the buckboard and tied Lion to a pine tree. As he started to unload the perennials he remarked: "Why don't you raise vegetables next year? You got plenty of room for 'em here, and the Captain and I could dig you a nice garden."

"I will—if I come back next year," replied Edwina.

"Ain't you plannin' to? Mr. Heseltine seems to think you was. That's why he give you perennials instead of annuals. Miss Harriet suggested givin' you ageratum and things like that, but he says: 'No, they won't bloom next year.' So I got a truckload of phlox and Rosa rugosa."

As he piled the roses and the phlox and the other perennials at the edge of the half-wild slope he said to her: "It'll be awful nice to see this garden here lookin' tidy again. Nobody but you has ever taken any trouble with it."

"Who planted it in the first place, Sam? I've always wondered."

"Mrs. Heseltine."

"Linda's mother?"

"No, Linda's grandmother. Like you, she had a way with flowers. She only lived here the one summer—while

they was doin' over part of the Big House—and this garden's bloomed ever since."

"She had 'the green fingers.'"

"That's nice—'the green fingers.' I never heard it called that. Anyway, I can remember her puttin' in them lupines. I was just a boy, and she got me down here to spade the place up. While we were settin' out the plants her husband—Mr. Heseltine—come along, and he says to her: 'What are you doin' that for?' And she says to him, quick as a minnow: 'I'm doin' this so you'll have something to remember me by.' She laughed when she said it, but she must have had an idea then that she was goin't die the next winter. She was awful nice," he added reflectively, leaning on his spade for a moment. "Handsome. Pleasantest woman I ever knew. The rest of the family didn't take after her at all. I mean, her daughter ain't much like her, and God knows Linda ain't." He added with a grin: "Miss Harriet says to her father this morning, when she saw all that truckload of plants, 'What are you givin' her all that for? You don't know whether she's comin' back.' And he says to her with one of his chuckles—as sweet as you please: 'Maybe she won't—but I'll have something to remember her by.'"

Edwina looked at him bleakly. "I want to come back," she said, "but you never know! . . ."

"You ain't goin' to die—you're too young and handsome."

"I wasn't thinking of dying," she replied. "There are other things almost worse."

The remark, and the fashion in which she delivered it, confused him, and he went back to work in silence.

The morning turned to afternoon, and the garden took on a semblance of order. In the soil once populated by wandering blackberry vines stood clumps of valerian and campanulas and swarthy green rugosas. Owing to the fact that some of the plants were in bloom the garden gave the spurious effect of having been there for some time, and the air was full of the spicy odour of old-fashioned

dianthus. Edwina picked some and stuck them in her hair; and admired the white and salmon and violet phlox against the dull grey background of the sea. Her eyes were bright, and her cheeks were rosy with exertion. Sam looked at her and thought: "Handsome! That's what she is—handsome!" Edwina was still admiring the flowers, and Sam was still admiring Edwina, when Harriet rolled suddenly out of the woods on her bicycle and joined them.

"I just came down," she explained rather stiffly, "to see how you were getting along with your garden."

"Marvellously, thanks!" replied Edwina politely. As Harriet made no comments, she added with slightly dampened enthusiasm: "It was terribly sweet of Mr. Heseltine to give me so many plants. They make the garden look so much better."

Harriet looked at the garden between herself and the ocean in silence. The phlox was what disturbed her most. Finally she said, with an emphatic shake of her head: "Some of those plants ought never to have been moved, because they're in bloom. But that's father. I tried to argue with him, but he wouldn't listen."

"I was worried about them, too," Edwina said, "but I think that if I pour quarts of water over them they'll be all right."

"Quarts! You haven't got quarts of water. That's the trouble with Juniper Cottage—the well goes dry. You'll have to be careful."

"We can always bathe in the sea, and drink bottled water. I don't care as long as the plants survive."

Harriet looked a little grim. Her eyes wandered from the garden to the house and back again. She took in the fact that Edwina had painted the porch furniture an attractive shade of blue and that the grass in front of the house had been trimmed into a semblance of a lawn. Some of the weeds had been removed from the road and the mussel shells tossed back again into the sea. There was an air of neatness and permanency about Juniper Cottage

which it had never worn in fifty years of summer leases. "My God!" thought Harriet to herself, "I really think she means to buy it. And Clarice will be just fool enough to sell it to her."

Her eyes came to rest, finally, upon Edwina herself. Their grimness changed to one of sentiment. In a peculiar, uncompromising fashion she was really quite fond of Edwina. Unusually so, considering the fact that Edwina was everything Harriet would like to be and was not. Edwina's beauty should have made Harriet wildly jealous, but it had the opposite effect of making her terribly sorry for her. Harriet felt—with some justification—that beauty like Edwina's is more of a liability than an asset. To quote Harriet's private thoughts on the subject—extreme beauty was bound to get a woman into trouble. She did not know, but she suspected, that Edwina had been in trouble before now. When her face was in repose her eyes had very disturbing shadows in them; reminders, without a doubt, of a disturbing past. And she was about to add something to those shadows—whatever they were—but it couldn't be helped.

Sam was in the act of tramping down a clump of valerian, and she said to him: "When you've finished that go back up the hill. Mr. Heseltine wants you to roll the tennis court this afternoon."

Turning to Edwina she continued: "Laurie Channing is coming up this week-end, and we're getting the court ready so that he and Linda can play tennis. Father says that Linda is in need of more exercise. She's been painting so hard lately that she hasn't had any for weeks, and it's really very bad for her. She was as cross as a bear at dinner last night. Father thinks she'd better stop painting for a while—she's been overdoing it."

Edwina made no comment because she was thinking how difficult it was for people who were not even faintly talented in any way to understand those who were. Of course Linda was tired, and why wouldn't she be? Nicholas was exhausted after a day at his easel. Most

people seemed to think that painting was merely a delightful hobby, and they were surprised and a little resentful if it made the artist tired and cross. It would be impossible to explain to Harriet that art was a full-time job. Linda would have months, possibly years, of gruelling work before her pictures were hung on the line. Although Edwina doubted it very much because the girl looked strong and husky, Linda's health might suffer, but she would have something to show for it in the end. To quote *Jackanapes*, you might be "killed by a thunderbolt if you were a butter merchant."

She was annoyed with Harriet and wondered how she could get rid of her speedily without sounding rude. She was about to remark that she had had no lunch, in the hope that Harriet, who had already eaten hers, would take the hint and leave, when that lady added:

"We don't think she'd better have any more lessons with Mr. Chadbourne for a while. As I said, we think she's been overdoing it. You saw how she flounced out of the house last night. She's never bad-tempered like that."

Edwina felt that Linda's bad temper was being subtly blamed on Nicholas. She replied stiffly: "You heard what Nicholas said last night. He's going to work terribly hard from now on—he has to if he's ever going to have a show in New York this autumn. The summer's half over, and he hasn't done a thing. From now on he won't have time to give Linda painting lessons. She'll have to sketch by herself."

Harriet was patently relieved for some reason; but her eyes still wore an expression of doubt and profound uneasiness. Edwina wondered what it was all about. Surely Harriet couldn't be this upset over Linda's temper of the night before! She wondered again how she could get rid of her without sounding rude. But Harriet took things into her own hands.

"Look here!" she said bluntly, "this is none of my business—or rather, it is some of my business because it

involves Linda—but I think we'd better put a stop to it right now."

"Stop to what?" asked Edwina, completely at a loss.

Harriet scowled at a clump of valerian and said: "I suppose the whole thing is perfectly innocent and all that—I'm not blaming Nicholas—but Linda is a little fool."

"What do you mean?" demanded Edwina, controlling her mounting anger. She was full of a deep, icy rage. Rage at Harriet. Not rage at Linda or at Nicholas—but anger with Harriet for daring to suggest that Nicholas was guilty of anything at all.

Harriet looked at her with clumsily veiled pity, and spoke quite frankly. Frankness, after all, was the best policy; she had Linda's future at stake, and Edwina's too. With a nod she said: "I don't think they'd better go anywhere unchaperoned after to-day. If you can't go with them, I'll go."

Edwina said nothing.

"It *looks* so badly!" explained Harriet awkwardly.

Edwina did not hear her. By now her anger was so tremendous and so shattering that it drowned out everything but the loud thumping of her own heart. Outraged and indignant, she faced the other woman with a stifled exclamation of rage and impatience. Her face was as grey as the clouds over her head, and her eyes were sparkling with unspoken contempt. Finally she was able to speak. "I still don't see what you mean," she said freezingly. "I thought that American girls seldom—if ever—had chaperones!"

Harriet replied quickly: "They don't—unless they go out with *older married men*." She added, with increasing stubbornness: "You don't seem to care. But *I* do."

After an interminable silence Edwina heard herself saying: "Very well. . . . I see what you mean! You're afraid Nicholas will hurt her reputation. I won't let it happen again." Her voice was as cutting as a blade of Damascus steel, and it would have destroyed the equanimity of any one less armoured than Harriet was

that afternoon. With the aplomb of one who knows she is doing it all for the best, Harriet added:

"I would have gone with them this morning—I suppose I really should have—but father wanted me to play cribbage with him. At any rate, I was a bit upset when I saw them go together on the ferry."

Edwina's hands had been clenched with anger up until then; but at Harriet's final bombshell they sprang open and remained limply at her side; and she looked blankly at the ocean with an expression of mingled surprise, doubt, and bewilderment. Her face grew deathly pale. It was no longer the colour of the leaden sky; it had the waxy whiteness of the phlox half-way down the slope.

Harriet felt desperately sorry for her. But she never, never for a moment lost sight of the fact that she was right, and that she was doing it all for the best. Edwina turned her head slowly and looked her straight in the eye. Her gaze was perfectly steady; but her eyes had the colour and the cold texture of steel. Harriet thought as she met that implacable stare: "My God! but she's got self-control. Most women would have told me to go to hell, or would have burst into tears."

Edwina said slowly: "Nicholas went to Rockland to buy some zinc white. He wanted me to go with him, but I knew your father was sending me some plants, and I was afraid they would die if I left them until to-morrow. So I didn't go."

She made a little gesture towards the house and the garden, and said: "I didn't want my flowers to die, because I love my garden. I love my house, too. I've been extremely happy in it, and I want to come back next year. Don't you think that it would be better if we forgot this stupid conversation, so that next summer will be as pleasant as this one has been? As your father says, we seem to have very little to talk about . . ."

Harriet replied, in the kindest voice she could muster at the moment: "I agree with him, absolutely, that scandal is very unpleasant. That's why I'm warning you,

my dear! I'm only warning you for your own good," she added gently, with a smile. " You don't want a scandal any more than I do. I'm afraid you don't quite realize what this place is like. We're all so terribly intimate that anything that goes on is common property—we discuss each other's affairs too much, I'm afraid. So, you see, you mustn't take any risk with your—happiness."

Edwina bit her lip. She wanted very much to tell Harriet to mind her own business—that her happiness was her own concern—but she let the remark pass. For Mr. Heseltine's sake—and because the island was too small to contain herself and Harriet if she let go and told her what she really thought of her—Edwina changed the subject by announcing that she had had no lunch. Harriet fortunately took the hint. Returning her voice to its normal, matter-of-fact pitch, she said briskly: "Don't forget—that soil's acid! It needs lime and bone meal. See—those valerians have begun to wilt already. I'll send you a book on gardening. Good-bye, my dear!"

In another moment she was gone. But something was gone, also, from the colour of the day. The morning had been grey, but the afternoon was even greyer. It was perfectly true; the valerians *had* begun to wilt, and the phlox were showing signs of fatigue. But Edwina was quite sure that it was only because Harriet had put some sort of a blight upon them. The wind that ruffled the garden had a bitter chill in it—the chill of autumn and decay. She felt suddenly and desperately alone. The sea had never seemed so wide, nor the sky so limitless, nor the island so far from home. Unconsciously she turned her head and looked out over the grey waste of salt water which lay between herself and her heart's real desire, and her eyes glimmered with unshed tears of homesickness. She was frightened—oh! so terribly frightened. She had lived with fear and apprehension for years, but it was only one kind of fear—the fear of being found out. But now another terror pervaded her. She looked wretchedly

at the heaving water below her, hardly seeing it through her tears; and in her extremity she told herself that it could not possibly be true. Nicholas loved her. He loved her more than any one—Harriet included—knew. That was the trouble! She could not tell Harriet how much Nicholas loved her—her mouth was sealed permanently.

What was that about seals? “Set me a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm. . . . Many waters cannot quench love. . . .”

There was a lot of water out there . . . enough to put out the “vehement flame”—but not enough to extinguish the love they had for each other.

Whatever there was between Nicholas and Linda was a figment of Harriet’s frustrated, over-active imagination. No one else would think of it. There was absolutely no basis at all for this growing anxiety in her mind, this cold fear that was chilling her bones like a winter wind. She was being extraordinarily stupid.

Brushing her unshed tears out of her eyes with the back of her hand, she picked up her trowel and walked slowly up to the house. Behind her the wheeling gulls circled over the newly planted garden, wondering if there was anything there to scavenge; and a rabbit came timorously out of the woods in search of vegetation. From the sea came the deep-toned voice of the bell buoy chiming listlessly in a ground swell which was rolling in across the reef. And the air was full of the damp, salty taste of the wide Atlantic. She put her hand up to her throat and choked back a sob.

“Oh, God!” she said to the grey sky above her head, “don’t take me away from this place! Please! I’ve suffered enough. And don’t take Nicholas away from me! Oh, God! tell me it isn’t true!”

Then she went indoors and firmly shut the door on all the beauty she had left outside. Beauty, at that moment, was unbearable.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ferry whistle echoed from the other side of the island, but Edwina was too preoccupied to hear the two short blasts which meant the return of Nicholas from Rockland. Her mind was on the flowering slope below her. Her elbows were propped on the sill of her bedroom window, and she was looking down at the garden, which seemed extraordinarily tidy now that she had finished with it for the day. The removal of the blackberry vines had revealed dozens of seedling lupines, struggling for an existence under their cloying tendrils, and a small rose bush—not a rugosa, but a double, pink spice rose—which she had transplanted to a sheltered part of the garden where it was safe from the Atlantic storms.

The ferry blew again, and this time she heard it, and the light ebbed out of her face.

She was still of the opinion that Harriet's insinuations were not only outrageous, but silly. However, the fact remained that Nicholas and Linda in their innocence had put an idea into Harriet's head, which must now be removed by the simple expedient of keeping the two artists separated for a while. Things she might have said to Harriet, and didn't, occupied Edwina's mind for the next few minutes, among them the salient fact that Nicholas was old enough to be Linda's father.

Nicholas was forty-two. Not so old to any one like herself who was over the age of thirty, but to Linda he must seem so advanced in years that he was no longer of interest romantically.

And as for Nicholas—he always referred to Linda as “that child,” indicating that as far as he was concerned she was still in the schoolroom.

Edwina decided—leaning farther out of the window to catch the heady bouquet of upturned soil—that Harriet was too much of a Philistine to believe that a man and a girl could go out sketching together every day and do

nothing else. Knowing little or nothing of the workings of the artistic mind—which works with a type of concentration denied the inartistic—Harriet of course believed the worst, and Edwina was afraid that no matter how clearly, or how forcibly, she pointed out to Harriet that Nicholas was only giving Linda painting lessons, Harriet would maintain that he was seducing her.

Harriet's indignation was annoying, but it was also funny. Looking back on it now, the whole conversation had had its ridiculous side. "Perhaps," thought Edwina, "if I'd laughed at her I'd have been able to shut her up immediately. That's what I should have done, I suppose. It's a pity I didn't think of it earlier."

She removed her elbows from the window sill, and was about to finish dressing when she heard voices. One of them belonged to Nicholas, the other to Linda.

Her first thought was: "How stupid of Nicholas to bring Linda to the house!" But, of course, he wouldn't know that Harriet was on the warpath that afternoon. She would undoubtedly scold Linda for her indiscreet trip to Rockland with Nicholas, and it would be disastrous if she found her at Juniper Cottage. Edwina hovered indecisively by the open window, wondering whether it would sound frightfully odd and rude to lean out and tell Linda to go away again; and while she was trying to make up her mind Linda and Nicholas hove into view. Nicholas was loaded down with bundles, among them the necessary bone meal. One of his pockets bulged with mail, she saw with satisfaction. He was carrying among other things a small wicker basket, and Edwina wondered what sort of merchandise it contained. Linda for some reason was carrying a bottle of milk.

They looked exhausted from the day's journey.

Both of them came to a halt at the top of the renovated garden with cries of surprise and admiration. Although fatigue was apparent in their voices they were not too tired to be appreciative, and their comments on her prowess as a gardener made Edwina flush modestly. After that

she could not put her head out of the window and tell them she was there without feeling acutely self-conscious, so she remained hidden and looked down upon them without a word. Nicholas stared at the garden for a long while. And then he turned to Linda and said dreamily:

"It's all exactly as it should be—even to the pinks and the valerian. . . . She's even got some rose bushes there among the rocks. It makes me feel rather—choky."

Linda's voice was more matter of fact. "What *are* you talking about?"

"Come inside," replied Nicholas, "and I'll show you."

The walls of Juniper Cottage were very thin. Edwina could hear them enter the living-room. Still she did not move. Nicholas had not the faintest suspicion, apparently, that she was there in her bedroom or he would have called her name at once. "He thinks I've gone to tea with Mr. Heseltine, I suppose," she told herself. Even then she did not know why she stayed rooted to the floor by the open window in utter silence. Over the splash of the waves outside she could hear his voice saying to Linda: "Ah! here it is. Now, see if you don't think this is lovely."

Nicholas's voice, with its resonant English accent, had good carrying powers. Edwina could hear him quite plainly.

" Set here the phlox and the iris, and establish
Pinc and valerian, and the great and lesser bells;
But suffer not the sisters of the year to publish
That frost prevails.

How far from home in a world of mortal burdens——"

Edwina's cry was unpremeditated, and it slipped out before she could stop herself: "Nicholas!"

The name echoed oddly among the rafters of the little house, and came back at her like the voice of doom.

Trembling, she added: "Oh, Nicholas! did you bring the mail? I want my letter from Evelyn."

Nicholas's voice stopped like a radio that has been switched off. There was a momentary, trenchant silence, and then he called upstairs in surprise: "Oh, hallo, darling! I didn't know you were there. I thought you'd gone out. Linda's here," he added superfluously.

Edwina heard him say to Linda: "Read the rest of this while I give Edwina her mail. I'll be back in a moment and we'll have a drink."

At that, Edwina quietly vanished into the bathroom. She did not want to see him, and when he called to her through the door she told him that she was in her bath. He went downstairs again, and she crept out of the bathroom and found a letter from Evelyn lying on her bureau. She stared at it for quite a while before she touched it, and then she picked up the grey-blue envelope with unsteady fingers and tore it open.

"THE PRIORY, Little St. Margaret's, Hants."

She tried to read what followed; but Evelyn's neat legible handwriting made no sense at all. Much as she wanted news from home, she could not pin her attention down to the letter in her hand, because her mind was in the living-room. With a gesture of defeat she lay down across the bed and buried her head in her arms. "In a little while," she thought, "Nicholas will wonder where I am and come after me. I'll have to get up, then, and go downstairs. But I can't face it now. Not until I get over this giddy feeling."

She told herself violently that there was nothing in it. That it was a perfectly natural thing for Nicholas—who was unusually fond of poetry—to read one of his favourite poems to Linda. But try as she would she could not lose sight of her own fateful prophecy:

"If I ever hear you spouting poetry—the way you did—I'll know that you're in love again."

Stupid. But there it was. And it made her head reel.

It was possibly the only thing which could have made

her suspicious of his feelings towards Linda. History was repeating itself with dreadful simplicity. The scene going on downstairs was almost the perfect replica of one which had occurred in the library at Prince Setton. Gertrude had walked in upon them just as Nicholas was reading the last lines of the "Chorus from Atalanta." She had waited politely until he was through; and then she said to him with a mocking smile: "Poetry again, Nicholas?"

Edwina could see her now, standing with her blonde head cocked a little on one side, her red lips parted in a sneer.

She wondered what would happen if she went downstairs and said the same thing. But she knew—without wondering about it—that she was totally incapable of doing such a thing. Gertrude had not been cursed with good breeding.

She listened for a moment, but their voices were so low that they were indistinguishable just then above the murmur of the incoming tide. "At least," she thought grimly, "he's not reading her any more poetry—I could hear him if he was, because he always does it in such a penetrating voice, like a don on a platform." No, they were talking about something totally different. She strained her ears a little harder, and was rewarded for her pains by hearing Linda exclaim: "Isn't it *enchanting!*"

"Enchantment" again—damn that word, anyway!

Then Nicholas called out—making her jump because she was quite sure by then that he had forgotten all about her. He said with an exclamation of impatience:

"What in the world are you doing up there, Edwina? You're taking an unconscionable amount of time it seems to me! Come on down!"

Edwina rolled over and shouted back at him: "I haven't read my letter yet. I'll be down as soon as I've finished."

"Hurry up!" His voice had a note of real urgency in it, and Edwina was so afraid that he would come bounding up the stairs after her and find her lying on the bed

half clad, with the letter lying on the floor, where it had blown in a sudden gust of wind, that she got quickly off the bed and began to dress. She propped the letter against her scent bottles and read most of it while she was putting on her stockings. It was not very long. But it was long enough to make Edwina turn a pale, sickly green.

She dragged herself to her feet and went downstairs. Nicholas saw how pale she was; and his eyebrows rose perceptibly. He made no comment, but looked at her unhappily, with a searching expression. Edwina flashed him a brief smile in return, but ignored him otherwise. She said to Linda politely: "Hallo! Did you have a nice day in Rockland?"

"Yes and no," replied Linda quite truthfully. "I got frightfully tired for some reason."

Nicholas added: "She complained so of fatigue that I brought her back here for a drink."

Then his eyes, curiously enough, began to smile. "I say, darling!" he exclaimed to Edwina with hidden amusement, "those mice made the most fearful racket last night! I couldn't sleep a wink. I think it would be a good idea if we bought a cat."

"But you don't like cats," objected Edwina, looking—not at him—but at the generous portion of whisky she had given herself.

"I'd rather be cursed with cats than insomnia," he grinned.

Something in his voice made her look up at him quickly. "Nicholas!" she exclaimed with a cry of suspicion, "have you bought a cat?"

"Yes, darling! I've bought you a nice tomcat. No, it's a pregnant female."

Linda burst into giggles. "He doesn't know what it is!"

Edwina said to them grimly: "Was that what the milk was for—and the basket, too, I suppose?" adding with a cry of scorn: "It was cruelty to animals to put a grown cat in a basket that size!" And striding over

to the basket she flung it open with a gesture of disgust and anticipation.

The basket was quite empty.

"It's run away, I suppose!" she remarked cuttingly, "and no wonder, after a trip in that basket! I'd have run, too. Really, Nicholas! Just because you don't like cats, that's no reason to—"

Both Linda and Nicholas collapsed with laughter at that point. They seemed to think that she was screamingly funny. As their laughter subsided Linda exclaimed: "Go on, Nicholas! Fun's fun—but it must be suffocated by now. Go on—show it to her!"

With a grin he put his hand in his pocket and brought out an agitated little bundle of fur. It could not have been more than six weeks old. It was a pale apricot colour, and its eyes were bright blue. "Charming, isn't it?" remarked Nicholas admiringly: "And worth all of three dollars."

"Give it to me!" said Edwina in a throaty voice.

She snatched the kitten away from him and buried her eyes in its soft, abundant fur—but she was not quick enough to hide her tears from Nicholas, who looked pensive. She'd wanted a cat for years, but he'd never been willing to let her have one until to-day. He said he was allergic to them—they made him sneeze. But to-day, for some reason, he had bought her a cat; a perfectly useless cat as far as mousing was concerned. What had happened in Rockland to make him so generous?

He'd be telling her she could have a child next.

Both of them were totally unconscious of Linda, who gave them a sharp look and said grimly: "Well, I'm glad it's a success, after all the trouble we had with it. It scratched Nicholas twice, so we had to pay another dollar for a basket."

Nicholas remembered her presence with a little start.
"Will you have another drink?"

"No, thanks!" said Linda firmly, rising. "I'm going home now." Both of them urged her rather half-

heartedly to sit down again and have some more Scotch, but she was already on her way to the door. As she was going out she turned with a faint grin, and said: "Thank you, Nicholas, for giving me such a nice day!" Then with a little wave of her hand she was gone.

"Thank you, Nicholas," echoed Edwina softly, with a hidden touch of irony, "for giving me such a nice cat!"

"Don't mention it!" he murmured, his mind on other things.

"Did *you* have a nice day?" she added, mechanically stroking the kitten and watching him out of one eye.

Like Linda he answered: "Yes and no."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic!"

"I wanted to be alone," he replied shortly. "That was why I went to Rockland in the first place. I was in a foul humour this morning and I wanted to get away by myself. This place is so damn small—you can't get away from people."

"That was why you didn't want me to go with you."

"Partly."

"Why didn't you come back, then, when you saw that she was on the ferry?"

"She was in the pilot house—I didn't see her. We were half-way across before I discovered that she was on board, and then—naturally—I had to be polite and talk to her."

"Did you lunch together?"

"Yes. . . . We had lobster rolls."

Nicholas exclaimed suddenly and uneasily: "Edwina! Whatever is the matter with you? You're positively green! I noticed that something was wrong the moment you came in the room, but I didn't like to mention it in front of Linda."

Edwina made no reply. She walked silently across the room with the kitten and put it down on the sofa without answering him. The cat settled down at once among the sofa cushions and began to purr—although its purr was

so small they could not hear it. Then Edwina poured herself out another drink. Her hands were unsteady, and some of the whisky splashed over the edge of the glass.

"Careful, darling!" said Nicholas absently—and he thought to himself: "She never drinks as much as that! Oh, God! why did I go to Rockland? I was a fool—a fool!"

His impulse was to rise and take her in his arms, but something in her pale face made him plunge his hands even deeper into his pockets. There was an untouchable look about her which made him utterly miserable. He wanted to shout in his distress: "It's all damn' nonsense! I had no idea she was on the boat!" but the look in her eye stopped him.

Finally, after æons of time, Edwina spoke. Her voice was steadier now because of the whisky she had consumed. Her lips wavered into a little smile, as though her distress—whatever it was—now appeared to be slightly funny. "I've had a letter from Evelyn," she said calmly.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed with badly concealed relief, "have you?" So that was what was wrong with her—not this trip to Rockland.

"Yes. It was full of news."

"Bad news, I suppose, from the look of you."

"Quite!"

She paused again, and he said to her with impatience: "Well, go on! What did she say?"

"I don't know whether you can 'take it' after your sleepless night and your fatiguing trip to Rockland," replied Edwina, still looking down at her glass of whisky with a maddening half-smile. "Gertrude—is on her way to America."

Nicholas gave an exclamation of surprised annoyance, followed by a dry laugh. "That's jolly!" he said. He took his hands out of his pockets and ran them through his hair with a gesture of bafflement, and he began to look not only annoyed but frightened as well. She could see

that he was wondering what Gertrude was up to now. She was sorry for him, but much as her arms ached for him she held them rigidly to her sides. He glanced up and caught her eye, and his mouth curved into an ironic, though worried, smile.

"That's just jolly," he said again.

"I thought you'd like it," she murmured, adding: "It will be wonderful if she finds out where we are and comes here."

"She won't," said Nicholas with a shake of his tousled head. "You do her an injustice. She's not quite that ill-bred."

Edwina felt that Gertrude was capable of anything, but she held her tongue.

"My wife," he added, "may not be a lady, but at least she's no fool."

C H A P T E R X X

LINDA walked rapidly homeward for perhaps an eighth of a mile, and then her pace slackened. Her fatigue was very apparent. Like Nicholas, she had spent a sleepless night. Only it was the nightingales—not mice or squirrels—which had kept her awake. A full moon and a cloudless sky had combined to rouse the emotions of every song sparrow on the island, and they had seemed unusually loud and ardent. The beauty of the moonlight coupled with the snatches of melody coming from every tree had destroyed what little repose she had left after her hour with Nicholas on Singing Beach. When morning came she was cross and nervy; her head ached, and she felt restless and out of sorts. Blaming her malaise on her sleepless night and the too-ardent voices of the nightingales, she had decided that salt water was the only cure for it, and in the dawn she had walked down to Fiddler's Beach and plunged into the sea.

But not even the biting cold of the Atlantic could dispel

her profound uneasiness. After breakfast she decided to go to Rockland. She wanted to run as far as possible from Singing Beach and all that it implied. She wanted, in fact, to get away from Nicholas. Outside of her own boat, which might be spotted immediately and rouse the curiosity of every one on the island, the only method of transportation open to her was the ferry. So she had gone aboard it at an early hour after breakfast and hidden herself in the pilot house until sailing time.

It was not until she was half-way to Port Hard that she had issued from the pilot house and found Nicholas sitting in the stern with a brooding expression. They were the only people on board.

Nicholas looked at her as though he had seen a ghost. But the look was fleeting. It changed at once to a polite smile. "Oh, hallo!" he exclaimed. "Fancy finding *you* here! Did you rise, like Venus Anadyomene, from the sea, or what?"

"I was in the pilot house," she explained briefly. "I had no idea that you were on board."

"Nor had I that you were in the pilot house."

"Where's Edwina?" she continued uneasily. "Didn't you bring her with you?"

"No. She couldn't come. She was knee deep in loam when I left her."

He then asked her disconcertingly why she was going to Rockland.

There was no good reason, of course. She hunted wildly around in her mind for one that would sound even plausible until she remembered her hair; she told him that she was going to have it shampooed. That sufficed—he seemed to swallow it whole. An unreasonable and impish desire to make him feel equally uncomfortable prompted her to ask why *he* was on the ferry.

"I've run out of zinc white," he said casually enough.

He turned and gazed at her meditatively, almost as though he wanted to say something further. But after a moment or so of reflection he turned his eyes away from

her again and looked at the floating lobster-pot buoys and the grey, lowering sky. He was smoking a pipe; and he thought so hard and so fiercely about what was bothering him that after a while it went out. But he did not seem to mind; he just sat there, chewing the stem, with his eyes glued to the sea. His face was totally blank.

Linda wondered whether she ought to go back into the pilot house.

She suspected that he wanted to be alone; but now that she had run into him by mistake she could not bear to leave him. A gentle warmth was creeping through her veins, a *gemuthlichkeit* so soul-destroying that it left her pale and helpless. There was a wild, sweet feeling in her breast, and the cold morning air was full of the ghostly echo of nightingales.

Finally, as they were nearing Port Hard, he said: "You'll lunch with me, won't you?"

Her heart bounded tremulously with joy; but she wondered sensibly whether it might not be a very good idea to stay in Port Hard after all and let him go on alone to Rockland. She was still rather under the impression that he wanted to be alone. He said it again, however; and this time his voice had a little note of anxiety in it. Obviously he wanted her. "All right," she nodded dubiously, "I'll meet you after I get my hair-do."

"Where?"

"In the bar of the hotel," she told him; adding to herself, "I'll need a drink by then."

Nicholas took the pipe out of his mouth and knocked it on the gunwale with a preoccupied air. He said, as the ferry slowed down for the harbour buoys: "It was undoubtedly some sort of mental telepathy that made us both want to go to Rockland this morning."

The remark was disconcerting in the extreme. She gave him a sidelong glance, wondering exactly what he meant, but his face was as bland as a cloudless sky and as innocent as a field of daisies. She had just decided—with a vast sense of relief—that he meant nothing by it at all when

he added a remark which promptly destroyed what equanimity she had left:

"I thought I needed a change of scene because I stayed awake all night."

After a trenchant silence she heard herself replying: "Was it nighingales that kept you awake all night?"

"Nightingales of sorts. Oh, Linda! Linda! Why did you come to Rockland with me?"

"I didn't!" indignantly. "At least, not on purpose. I wanted to be alone this morning just as much as you did."

The startled look in his eye made her add hastily: "I was awake all night, too. Those damn' birds——"

"Ah! yours were real birds, were they? That's different."

"No, it's not," she said tartly, with mounting nervousness combined with annoyance, "it was just as bad—in fact, it was worse. The moon was full, and they made such a racket I couldn't sleep a wink."

"Was that the only reason?"

"No."

Nicholas burst into laughter, and for one delirious instant he reached out and caught her hand. But he dropped it again like a hot potato. He was about to say something further when the Captain yelled to her to come and help him with the ropes. With a feeling of relief she hurried towards the bowlines, leaving Nicholas to cope with the ropes in the stern. By the time they were alone together again in the bus his manner had reverted once more to a pensive though courteous detachment interspersed with flashes of his usual flippant wit. His eyes seemed to say: "Don't let's get serious!"

Her mind was so confused by that time that she did not know whether to be relieved or sorry.

For the rest of the day his manner remained calm and imperturbable. He had perhaps one too many cocktails at lunch, and for the space of half an hour he became less austere. While eating his lobster roll—his first experience

of that delicacy—he lost some of his formality towards her and was quite gay and insouciant. But after lunch the cocktails had the unhappy effect of making him very sleepy, and he actually took a nap on the way back to Port Hard. Linda gazed wistfully out of the window of the bus while he dozed beside her, and came to the unhappy conclusion that Nicholas was not even faintly desirous of repeating yesterday's enchantment. She looked mournfully at the potato fields slipping past the window, and a little pang of renunciation shot through her. In his gentle way he was telling her good-bye. . . .

She must have groaned softly under her breath, because Nicholas woke up suddenly and looked at her in surprise. "What's that you're mumbling?" he said, sitting up.

"Nothing," she answered with a blush. "That was you, snoring."

"I don't snore."

"Then it was the rumblings of your conscience."

"Undoubtedly that was it. I've got a lot on my conscience!"

The way he said it made her a trifle nervous. She gave him a worried look, and said haltingly: "What—for instance?"

"You, my dear!" he replied in a low voice which was barely audible above the rattle of the bus. "I've got you very much on my conscience. I should have sent you back again to the island and gone on alone to Rockland."

"Why?" she asked. Her face paled, but she looked him steadily in the eye.

"You know perfectly well what I'm driving at," he said to her irritably. "Don't pretend that you don't know what I'm talking about. That's not only annoying but unworthy of your intelligence."

Nicholas went on with vigour, although he kept his voice well under the rattle of the bus: "You're a child still. You don't know anything at all about this sort of

thing—how sordid it can be—but I do. I am also old enough to know better."

"Better than what?" she asked derisively.

"Better than to go off the whole day like this—alone—with you."

"Why?" she said, still brazen and still nervous. "We have—often. We've been sketching together practically every day. I can't see what difference—"

Her apparent innocence seemed to irritate him profoundly. He said testily: "If you don't know why, I'm not going to tell you. Just figure it out, my dear, while I take another nap."

She was still trying to figure out exactly what he did mean when the bus rolled into Port Hard; what exactly was sordid about their trip to Rockland? As far as she was concerned, they seemed extraordinarily free from guilt.

Captain Angel was lolling in the door of the general store, waiting for them with mounting annoyance. When the bus came tumbling down the hill he sauntered forth to meet it with a peculiar expression, which was lost on Nicholas, but which she caught at once.

"He's mad at us!" she thought indignantly. "We're an hour late, of course—but what of it?"

Expecting a tart rebuke for her unpunctuality, she was surprised to hear him say to Nicholas: "Seein' as how you missed the two o'clock bus, I had plenty of time to hunt you up a cat."

"Cat?" echoed Nicholas blankly.

"The cat your wife was after. Josie was tellin' me she wants a coon cat awful bad."

"H-m-m!"

The Captain went on stubbornly: "Linda makin' you miss the bus that way gave me plenty of time, and I found you a beauty."

Nicholas objected that cats made him sneeze; but something in the old man's expression made him reconsider his statement. Also, he could not lose sight of the fact that

the mice in Juniper Cottage had danced a pizzicato ballet over his head all night. Finally he said reluctantly: "I suppose I'd rather have asthma than insomnia. How much is this animal going to cost me?"

"It'll cost you three dollars," said the Captain.

Linda was faintly suspicious of the old man. She did not know what he was up to, but she felt sure that there was something underlying all this. She followed him down the street with a baffled expression. He led the way into a house that smelled pleasantly of newly baked bread and starch. "It's got to be a good mouser," Nicholas was saying firmly, "otherwise I won't buy it. Three dollars is a lot of money to spend on a mere cat. Now, if I were buying a dog, three dollars wouldn't seem too much—"

"Here y're—here's your cat!" exclaimed the Captain shortly; and like a conjurer producing rabbits out of a hat, he pulled a pale yellow kitten out from under the stove.

"Is that what you call a cat?" said Nicholas finally, after a trenchant pause.

"This is the kind of animal your wife was askin' for," returned the Captain slowly. He gave Nicholas a long look, and handed him the kitten in silence.

Nicholas stroked it absently, saying: "Edwina never told me she wanted a kitten—at least, not *this* summer."

"I was kind of thinkin' you didn't know," agreed the Captain. "I knew how fond you was of her, and I kind of thought it was a good idea. That'll be three dollars," he added.

They paid for the cat, and went out again into the bright afternoon. Twice on the way to the wharf the kitten escaped from Nicholas's flurried grasp; and as it scratched him rather badly, the Captain suggested buying a basket. Linda did not offer to carry it for him—it was Edwina's cat. She strode ahead of him down the sunlit street and hopped aboard the ferry, narrowly missing a crate of eggs in her annoyance. For some

reason the kitten had upset her. The Captain reprimanded her soundly for endangering the eggs, and from the tone of his voice she gathered that she was completely out of favour with him that afternoon. The ferry swung out into the long harbour and laid its course for the open sea. When they were past the harbour buoys the old man put his head out of the pilot house and told her to come and mind the wheel while he spliced a rope. It was a silly command, and she was about to argue the point with him when something in his eye—the same peculiar expression he had worn as she got out of the bus—made her obey him without a word. There were times when she was a little afraid of him.

Nicholas did not follow her into the pilot house. He remained outside; and as she manoeuvred the ferry past the lobster pots at the mouth of the harbour she heard him in conversation with the Captain. Angel Face was in a garrulous mood, and half-way over—to her mortification and horror—she heard him bring up the unfortunate subject of her birth. Nicholas seemed vastly interested. The Captain spared him no details of the events of that now historic evening. He had put to sea in the ferry in the hope of getting a doctor there in time, only to have the boat spring a leak. He had turned back again and made the storm-tossed island with great difficulty; then—pinch-hitting for the absent doctor—he and Josie had engineered her difficult entry into the world. She was four weeks premature.

The story as he told it seemed to her not only indecent but humiliating; and the worst of it was that Nicholas thought it was decidedly funny. "Looked like a little red pig, she did!" affirmed the Captain with a Rabelaisian chuckle. "Ever seen a baby born? Well, it's quite a sight. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Gorry, how she did yell!" And Nicholas laughed heartily.

He said something indistinct, and then she heard the Captain add: "She ain't much more'n a baby now. She thinks she knows a hell of a lot, but she don't know much

more'n she did then. She looks like a grown woman, but she ain't." His voice had grown increasingly louder, so that the last two sentences reverberated in the pilot house. Linda was livid with indignation. A mist closed over her eyes, and she could barely see the dark headland of the island in her course. He had no right to talk to Nicholas that way about her! He was deliberately pointing out the difference in their ages; and he was trying to persuade Nicholas that she was not only brainless but silly, and that she lost her head at any given opportunity.

"What the hell!" she thought angrily, savagely twisting the ferry past a flotilla of lobster pot buoys, "what the hell is he driving at, anyway?"

She was smarting with tears of anger and dismay. The dark body of the island was growing larger and larger. In another five minutes they would be alongside the dock. Her day with Nicholas—the last, possibly, that she would have with him alone—was slipping through her fingers like a handful of dry sand. And the Captain showed no signs of taking over the wheel and letting her go to him. There was a time when the summit of human bliss was to be allowed to pilot the ferry into the island wharf. But now she exclaimed savagely to the walls of the pilot house: "I suppose Angel Face thinks I'm young enough, still, so that I'm getting a kick out of it!" and thrusting her head out of the window she asked him spitefully whether he was through putting bits of rope together, or whether he expected her to run his ferry for him indefinitely. He replied—exactly as she knew he would: "You take her into the wharf, Linda. Show Mr. Chadbouren what a nice job you can make of it."

There was nothing she could do but dock the ferry neatly, and control her emotions.

The late afternoon was silver and platinum, with a thin line of gold in it where the sun was going down the sky. The air was cold and fresh, and across it blew the fragrance of pine and hemlock and bayberry. The island seemed strangely silent on their return; and as they walked along

the dock they were wrapped in loneliness. Nicholas was carrying all of his bundles. She did not offer to help him, because at the end of the dock their ways would part. She did not know what to say to him—what flippant word to use as a good-bye. Helplessly, she walked along beside him trying to summon up her courage to leave him. She was weak with frustration and defeat.

They came to the end of the dock, and Nicholas turned to her. "Don't go," he said simply, "don't go home."

In her confusion she hesitated, and he added quickly: "You look tired and white. Come with me and I'll give you a drink."

She looked at him mutely under the dark trees, trying to make up her mind to leave him sensibly and go home. He said nothing more—just stood there looking down at her in silence. She fancied that she caught a pleading expression in his eyes, and her heart turned over. "All right," she heard herself saying at last. "I could do with a drink."

Nicholas walked ahead of her into the woods. As she followed him her heart was beating so loudly that she wondered why he did not hear it. Trotting in his wake she felt extraordinarily humble. He seemed so much stronger—and so much grander—than she did herself. For the first time she noticed the imperious way he carried himself, and the arrogant way his feet marched along the road ahead of her. He did not turn or look back at her once, and she trailed along in his wake demurely enjoying the sensation of being his humble servant. By that time she was carrying the milk.

Her humour had not entirely deserted her, and she sang a bar of "Good King Wenceslaus" under her breath a little derisively. Nicholas laughed, but did not speak.

. . . He seemed to be walking ahead of her now in the dusk. When she closed her eyes she could almost hear the echo of his footsteps as he strode over the ruts and the mussel shells. She could smell the tweed of his coat and the subtle aroma of Virginia tobacco. She could hear his

voice, no longer flippant but gravely beautiful, reading the lovely opening stanzas of the "Hardy Garden." It was a pity that Edwina had interrupted him just when she did. She would have liked to have heard him read the last, and loveliest, stanza. She had told him so when he came back into the room after giving Edwina her letter from home. Nicholas had tossed her a rather strange look; and had asked her if she knew anything at all about poetry, and whether she really cared for it. When she replied that she did, he had said oddly: "I thought as much! I'll have to read you some more when I have time . . ."

Her footsteps dallied along the road and then stopped altogether. The evening was utterly silent. She could hear nothing at all but the beating of her heart and the throb of the distant sea where the wind was rising instead of falling with the coming of night. "Rain to-morrow!" she thought, hearing the surge and thunder of the surf. . . . What was that about the "surge and thunder of the *Odyssey*"? . . . Islands!—they had a peculiar sort of magic about them. There was the island—Bermuda, she had been told—where Shakespeare had laid the *Tempest*; and there was of course the island of Calypso where Ulysses had come to such grief; and there was Lyonesse, a lost paradise somewhere at the bottom of the Atlantic; and there was England. . . .

She was trying to visualize the fabulous island from which Nicholas had sprung when the deep tone of a bell roused her suddenly from her abstraction. It was the ship's bell on her grandfather's porch, and no one ever rang it unless the summons to the Big House was imperative. With a start of surprise and uneasiness she pulled herself together and began to walk more rapidly. The sonorous notes of the bell floated out across the quiet evening like the voice of doom—whoever was ringing it would not stop—and she began to feel apprehensive and a little frightened. The bell was only rung if someone was very late for dinner—which she wasn't—or if someone was out

in a boat and there was a storm coming. Although the wind was rising there was no possibility of a storm. Added to that, all the little cat boats were at their moorings—that much she had noticed as she piloted the ferry into the harbour; and she could not understand why the bell was ringing with such vigour when there was apparently nothing to ring it for.

Growing more and more frightened, she walked rapidly and breathlessly up the hill. And at the top, just as she was entering her grandfather's garden, she came face to face with Harriet. The bell, meanwhile, had stopped.

Linda was too disturbed to notice the expression on her aunt's face. "Who," she demanded without preliminaries, "was ringing the bell like that? I was scared stiff!"

"I was ringing it," replied Harriet deeply.

"What'n hell for?" asked Linda crossly and irreverently. "You made me run all the way up the hill. Is there anything the matter?"

"I rang it because I wanted you. Where were you?" Something in her acid tone of voice irritated Linda so profoundly that she would not answer her. Harriet went on grimly: "The Captain came home at least an hour ago, and you were not with him. Your grandfather is terribly worried."

Linda looked at her in astonishment. "How did you know I was on the ferry? I didn't tell you where I was going this morning."

"No, but I saw you climbing aboard as I was on my way to the Gayly house. You had no business to go to Rockland like that and not tell us where you were going!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Linda angrily, with reason, "you seem to forget that I'm not a child any more. Why the hell should I tell you where I'm going?"

"Stop swearing! Your grandfather—"

"I'm sorry if I upset Grandpa, and if it worries him I won't do it again. But—"

"If your grandfather had known where you were going he would have absolutely forbidden it."

"Why?" demanded Linda, surprised and infuriated.

Harriet looked at her with a faint, and quite ladylike, sneer. "My dear girl!" she said bitterly, "you've made a complete fool of yourself to-day. I hope you realize it!"

Linda grew as white as the playsuit she was wearing. "What do you mean?" she stammered. "What kind of a fool?"

Harriet ignored the question. "Fortunately no one outside of myself and your grandfather knows what you were up to to-day—that, at least, is one blessing. We've caught this thing in time so that it won't get all over the island."

"What thing?" darkly.

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about."

The light was fading around them, and Harriet's face gleamed in the dusk like a gibbous moon. Her voice trembled with virtuous indignation. "Don't pretend to be so innocent and so childlike! It doesn't fool me a bit. I know exactly why you went on that ferry. I'd have stopped you, only I didn't want to make a scene in front of Mr. Chadbourne."

"Nicholas!" faltered Linda. "How did you know——?"

"Did you stop to think what you were doing when you got on that ferry; what a fool you were making of yourself? The worst thing a girl can do is to run after a man like that. I was disgusted with you! It was cheap, filthy, and undignified."

Linda gave a cry of dismay, but Harriet's voice cut through the dusk again like a sword: "This morning when you went to Rockland you were no better than a common little tart—you degraded yourself—you were just plain *cheap*. That man is twenty years older than you are, and added to that he's married! Do you realize what you're trying to do? You're trying to take a man away from his wife! You're nothing but a——!"

Harriet used an unmentionable word; and because she

seldom swore, Linda realized the enormity of the situation. In a blinding flash of lightning—a blitzkrieg of pain—she was forced to admit that one third of what Harriet said was true. She was—hopelessly, desperately, irretrievably—in love with a married man. But she was *not* running after him. And she was *not* trying to take him away from his wife.

"That's a damn' lie!" Linda cried angrily, "every bit of it! I had no idea that Nicholas was on the ferry. I went to Rockland to get my hair done, among other things. I suppose you've been telling Grandpa ever since I left that I had an assignation with Nicholas. I'll thank you to keep your mouth shut after this!"

"*Linda!*"

Shocked herself by the violence of her words, Linda muttered: "Well, you asked for it. You had no right to say those things about me."

"Now I'm sure you're infatuated with him!" added Harriet. Linda opened her mouth to protest, but Harriet was wound up now and she could not stop. "It's absolutely revolting! If I'd had my way you'd have been sent to Bar Harbour with your mother. I've known for days what was the matter with you. You've lost your head completely over this man and it's high time something was done about it. Added to that, you're wearing your heart on your sleeve. It would be different if you'd been discreet about it but you haven't been. By now the whole island knows you're trying to have an affair with a married man."

"*Trying!*"

"You've been running after him for weeks, and don't say you haven't."

Linda swore fluently, and Harriet cried out: "*I will not have you talk to me that way!*"

"And so what?" retorted Linda under her breath.

She turned her back on her aunt and moved away towards the house. Harriet let her go without argument because she was too weak from emotion to stop her. Linda

went into the house via the kitchen door. The Captain was sitting with his feet on the edge of the stove reading his favourite mail-order catalogue. Mrs. Angel was elbow-deep in flour, making pies. The old man gave her a penetrating look and said: "Where you been?"

"Juniper Cottage," she replied shortly.

"I thought as much. What did you want to go down there for? Ain't you been there enough lately?"

"I went down there for a drink," she said coldly.

"You're drinkin' too much these days."

A murmur of protest came from the other occupant of the kitchen. "Now you leave her alone, Daddy! That ain't none of your business."

"'Tis so my business. I brought her into the world. If she don't take a reef in them sails o' hern 'fore long, she's goin' to upset. I told her she ought to marry that Laurence feller."

If Mrs. Angel had not been present Linda would have told him abusively where he could go. As it was, she stalked out of the kitchen, letting the door into the pantry slam behind her. Once in the dark pantry, however, she gave way to her emotions. She was scarlet with rage and shame. Now that it was too late she realized what had been the matter with Angel Face all day. She understood why he flashed those peculiar looks at her from time to time, and why he had kept her imprisoned in the pilot house all the way home. Her feelings for Nicholas were apparent even to him . . .

Did every one—even the smallest Gayly child—know what was the matter with her? Was it that obvious?

Hot waves of shame and shivers of fright passed alternately over her tired body. The day, which had begun so auspiciously with a smile from Nicholas, now lay in ruins around her feet . . . Shame flooded her very vitals. Was that what Nicholas had been trying to tell her on the ferry when he changed his mind and did not speak? Was that what he had told her to figure out for herself, later,

in the omnibus? Had Nicholas been warning her that she was wearing her heart on her sleeve?

With a stifled groan of pain and heartache she clutched the dresser for support.

At that moment the pantry door swung open upon her grandfather. "Ah! there you are!" he exclaimed. "I was looking for you." He did not ask her what she was doing in there alone in the dark. Holding the door open for her to pass out ahead of him he said urgently: "Harriet's upstairs taking a bath, and we can have a 'quick one' before she comes down."

He did not inquire whether she had had a drink already that evening, but simply poured her out a generous shot of whisky and handed it to her in silence. As he poured himself another one he remarked: "Harriet was making an awful racket with that bell. I asked her to stop, but she said that she wanted you to come home in a hurry. Where were you?"

"Juniper Cottage," she said wanly.

Mr. Haseltine added: "Is there any truth in Harriet's allegation that you are seeing a little too much of Mr. Chadbourne?"

"Not the slightest," she told him promptly.

"She says that you and he went to Rockland together on the ferry this morning. Is that true?"

"Yes, damn it!" she muttered.

"I hope by accident and not design. Harriet seemed to think it was by design."

Linda closed her lips over an epithet. When she was more in control of her anger she said: "I assure you it wasn't an assignation. I went to Rockland because I wanted to be alone. If I had known that Nicholas was going there too, I wouldn't have gone. I was restless and I was fed to the teeth with everybody. This island is so small you can't get away from people. I didn't sleep all night," she added gloomily.

"That's too bad! Why not?"

"Nightingales," she grumbled.

"I saw you going down to Fiddler's Beach in the dawn, and I wondered what was up. I think you need exercise to make you sleep."

"So I'm told!"

"So I had the tennis court rolled this afternoon, and it is all ready for you and Laurie to play on this week-end. If I were you," he added, "I'd forget that you're an artist for a while and play some tennis. You've been working too hard."

Harriet could be heard moving about overhead. He looked at the ceiling thoughtfully and said: "Like opedildock, exercise is very good for the heartache."

Linda swallowed the tears of shame and mortification which were coursing down her throat. Looking at him through a glittering veil of water, she said: "Am I wearing my heart on my sleeve? I'm told that I do."

"No, my dear, it's not on your sleeve. It's in the right place still, but keep it there."

CHAPTER XXI

It rained, so they played ping-pong.

Outside the windows of the Big House the water poured down from the sky in silver sheets, and from the invisible sea came the mournful, cowlike voice of Blue Head. The attic where they were playing felt a trifle damp because the roof was leaking under the force of the rain; and as a cold drop of moisture fell on Linda's head she wondered how they were faring at Juniper Cottage, where the roof leaked prodigiously. She had not laid eyes on Nicholas since their ill-fated trip to Rockland. Thinking of him now, she missed a shot and gave Laurie the advantage. Laurie finished the game quickly and threw down his paddle.

With a supreme effort Linda hauled her mind up the hill again.

Laurie said to her with a frown: "You look tired. Let's sit down and smoke a cigarette."

"Grandpa won't let us smoke in the attic."

"Well, then, where can we go?"

Linda looked at the streaming rain and said: "I don't know. Not downstairs at any rate."

From the living-room below came the sounds of laughter and acrimony where a bingo game was in progress. Laurie said: "I don't want to get mixed up in that mob, do you?"

"No," said Linda, who had her own reasons for not wanting to mix with the population of Camel Island. "Let's go over to my house."

Laurie glanced dubiously at the rain which was pouring down with renewed vigour. "I'm afraid you'll get wet."

"You talk," said Linda, "as though I was a hothouse flower or something. Come on!" As he still hesitated she added derisively: "You never used to think I was fragile! What's the matter?"

He took her by the shoulders and looked down at her fondly, with a bemused expression. "You look different, somehow, this afternoon. I noticed it when I got off the ferry. You look sort of—ethereal!"

"Dear me!" she murmured with a grin.

"Honestly you do! . . . You look lovely," he added with feeling, drawing her closer. Linda slipped out of his arms with a little exclamation:

"Don't, Laurie! Don't kiss me here. Aunt Harriet, or somebody, might come up the stairs. And then the fat would be in the fire!"

"But I want to kiss you!" he murmured unhappily. "I haven't kissed you in weeks! . . ."

"Come down to my house. We'll be alone there—Mother's in Bar Harbour."

With a sigh, he followed her helplessly out of the room, down the back stairs, and out into the storm. The rain crashed around them through the trees and stroked their cheeks with icy fingers. Torrents of water were pouring

down the road, splashing through the ruts in miniature rivers. There was something magnificent in the way the rain was charging down from the overloaded sky; it had the dignity and grandeur of a music drama full of percussion instruments and noble melodies. Both of them caught some of the excitement going on around them; Linda's mind skipped ahead of her down the streaming road towards Juniper Cottage where Nicholas was setting out basins to catch the water from his leaking roof, and Laurie's mind was already in the Haseltine cottage, busy with his dreams.

The storm showed no signs of abating.

By the time they arrived at their destination they were—as predicted—dripping wet. Linda went upstairs to change her sodden clothes, leaving Laurie to light the fire. But when she came downstairs again she found him exactly where she had left him, sitting on the edge of the sofa in front of a cold hearth.

"Well," she said dryly, "what's struck you?"

"Come here!" he answered, motioning to the sofa beside him. She came as ordered, but sat down primly at the other end.

"Couldn't we have a fire?" she asked. "I'm frozen."

He appeared not to have heard her. His eyebrows were drawn together in a frown, and it was obvious that he was in some sort of difficulty. There was a look almost of pain on his face. Half knowing what his dilemma was, Linda did not offer to help him out of it, but sat there primly at the farther end of the sofa while he struggled with his problems. Eventually he looked up at her with a groan and said: "God! Linda—it's not fair to bring me down here like this. I want to kiss you terribly. But I don't want to spend the afternoon—necking—unless it's going to lead to marriage. Do you see what I mean? If it were any other girl—yes. But not you, Linda . . ."

To his surprise her eyes filled suddenly with tears.

"Did you think I brought you down here for *that*?" she said.

"No, of course not!" he exclaimed, catching her hand and raising it to his lips. "Only, darling, don't you see what I mean? I've come to the end of my rope. It's got to be all, now, or nothing. And by *all*," he added hastily, "I mean marriage."

She could hear the rain beating on the roof and the slender notes of a bell; but the rain was not as loud, and the bell not as mournful, as the beating of her own heart.

From the confusion in her mind one thought emerged: "Oh, God! if it was only Nicholas . . ."

She turned and looked at Laurie almost as though she were seeing him for the first time. She saw a young man of twenty-five, with a narrow, rather handsome face topped with dark curly hair, brown eyes, and a straight, rather determined nose—at least, it looked determined that afternoon. His mouth was grave and kissable. And his eyes were full of something that amounted—almost—to adoration. She looked at him with her mind, and was pleased by what she saw; but her heart was looking in another direction. The image of Nicholas rose before her, with its lean, austere features; and at the sight of him her heart wept a little.

"What's the matter, dearest?" said Laurie unhappily. "What have I said now? Your eyes are full of tears!"

"Oh, nothing," she said evasively, "just something . . ."

"Have I hurt you?"

"No . . . Kiss me, Laurie!"

Doubtfully and hesitantly, Laurie moved along the sofa. For some reason he did not like the wan note of urgency in her voice. It frightened him a little. But nevertheless he kissed her. She was fragrant with the wind and the rain and the salt tang of the open sea, and with a groan of delight he gathered her in his arms and found her lips. The rain thundered on the roof and danced into the flowing gutters with wild abandon. The stormy symphony crashed and roared outside the streaming windows; but the cold little room was very quiet.

Linda slipped out of his arms finally and sat up.

Laurie glanced at her uncertainly, and he began to speak in a rather faltering voice. "You do love me, don't you!" he said. "You must, or you couldn't kiss me that way. Last time I was here I was afraid you didn't, but now I sort of think you do . . . Look here!" he said with more energy, "you said the last time I was here that you didn't want to get married because you wanted to paint. You said you couldn't do both. But I disagree with you. We can't have any children just yet, anyway. You'll have plenty of time to go on with your painting. There's a fellow in my office who painted for a while after he left college. He says that you can take lessons at the Museum. I asked him all about it, and evidently it doesn't cost much. I thought it made so much sense that I found an apartment out there I can get for thirty dollars a month . . ."

Linda grew a little pale. "You didn't sign the lease, or anything, did you?" she asked nervously.

"No, but I told the man I'd let him know when I got back."

Linda saw the pathos of Laurie hunting for small apartments near the Museum. The knowledge that he was trying hard to see her point of view made her heart falter. With a pang she heard him say: "While I was out there looking around, I went into the Museum one day. Gosh! I don't know anything about art—but I guess I can learn. There was a picture in there I liked an awful lot—picture of some children standing beside a big Chinese vase. The vase was blue, and the kids had on white pinafores . . ."

"The 'Boit Children,'" supplied Linda, with her emotions in shreds.

"Well, anyway . . . if we lived near the Museum I could learn something about it . . ."

This time Linda reached out and pulled him close to her. "Don't, Laurie!" she said. "You're making me cry!"

"Why?"

"Because you're so damn' sweet . . ."

Laurie was rather baffled by her sudden ardour; but he was so happy to have her in his arms that he did not ask her why she was there, or why she was returning his kisses with such abandon.

After a while he sat up with a laugh and said: "Mother was trying to tell me at lunch that I had a rival."

"Rival?" echoed Linda with a cold chill of fear.
"Who?"

"That English fellow—what's his name?"

"He's married," said Linda promptly and forcefully.

"Well, anyway, she said I'd have a tough time this week-end because you went out painting with him every day and all day—she said I wouldn't see much of you."

"He was giving me lessons."

"Yeah, that was what she told me. She said it was a pity I couldn't give you lessons in something. She said he had cut me out entirely."

"That's a lot of hooey."

"Well, anyway, that's what she said."

There was a profound silence for a moment, and then Linda added: "What else did she tell you about me?" She looked at him, her eyes dark with apprehension.

"Oh, nothing much," replied Laurie vaguely, unconscious of the tumult going on in her bosom, "she just said you'd been having a lot of fun with those people. She seemed to think you had quite a crush on *him*. I told her I thought she was crazy. He's practically an old man, isn't he?"

"You thought right," said Linda with a nod. "He's got grey hair."

"Anyway," she added, "he's married."

Meanwhile up the hill at the Big House Harriet was beginning to wonder with some trepidation where Linda was. As a result, Patsy Gayly was despatched down the hill in the rain—chiefly because she owned, and was wearing, a pair of rubber boots. Patsy dallied in the rain, enjoying the wine-coloured brooks that coursed with such

a lovely rushing sound down the precipitous road. They reminded her of the Rackham illustrations for *Undine*: and while dallying she toyed with the picture of herself in the role of Undine, riding along with the knight on his charger in the centre of the storm. She was a practical child, not very often given to such flights of fancy, but this afternoon her mind was full of romantic mysteries. She went into the stable for a moment to have a word with Lion, who nosed her gently and asked for sugar which she had forgotten to bring him unfortunately; and then she continued on down the road, splashing happily through the rain.

She was singing blithely over the voice of the storm when she came out of the woods. The sea lay below her, heaving and rustling among the rocks; it was a drab grey, but wonderful nevertheless; and she stopped to admire its sullen loveliness. A dory went by at the foot of the garden, rowed by a man in a daffodil-yellow sou'wester. She waved to him; and then turned and knocked on the door of Juniper Cottage.

Nicholas looked at her in astonishment. "Hallo, my little puddle-duck!" he said. "What are you doing here in this weather? Come in! come in! and I'll give you a bottle of coca-cola."

"Is Linda here?" she asked, following him through the door.

"No. I haven't seen her in donkey's years."

Having fully expected to find Linda at Juniper Cottage, Patsy was slightly nonplussed. "Oh!" she murmured, "I thought of course she was here. Cousin Harriet sent me after her."

Nicholas said briefly, with a certain dry humour which was fortunately lost on Patsy: "Give your Cousin Harriet my regards, and tell her that I haven't laid eyes on Linda since last Wednesday."

"That's because Laurie's here," she informed him sagely. "She met him at the ferry, and they've been together ever since. I suppose she's with him now. And I

suppose," she added wearily, "I'll have to find them."

"Well, sit down for a moment and drink your coca-cola."

"Where's Mrs. Chadbourne?" added the child.

Nicholas replied: "Like you, she's out walking in the rain. She said the house was giving her claustrophobia, and she said that the bell buoy sounded like a sunken cathedral."

Patsy drained her glass and said with a frown: "I didn't think she looked so well yesterday when she was having tea with Nunky up at the Big House. She looked sort of . . . dilapidated."

Nicholas shot her a look of amusement mingled with dismay. He was impressed by her powers of observation, but it upset him to think that she had spotted the fact that Edwina was not herself. Patsy added: "Mrs. Chadbourne isn't here—you're all alone—come with me and help me find Linda! Please!"

Nicholas shook his head with a rather sad smile. "No, Patsy, I'm afraid not. Why not? Because I haven't any rubber boots."

Patsy was obviously disappointed. After urging him once more to come with her, she trailed out again into the rain and took the path along the sea. There was a fierce beauty in the wind and the rain which soaked and buffeted her; and young as she was its loveliness was not lost upon her. She was a little mournful because Nicholas would not come and share the pleasures of the storm . . . Undine . . . he was her knight . . . her "very, parfit, gentle knight" . . . and Lion was his charger . . .

In this frame of mind she reached the Heseltine cottage. She called out Linda's name. It echoed damply among the rocks, but that was the only answer she got. "Oh, well," she thought, "she must be in there—where else could she be?" So without more ado she pushed open the front door and stalked moistly into the living-room.

"Oh, there you are!" she said ineptly; and flushed scarlet.

Linda tore herself out of Laurie's arms with a gasp and sat up. "Patsy!" she exclaimed crossly, "Why the hell didn't you knock?"

"I did—that is, I yelled and screamed—but nobody heard me. And no wonder!" she added a trifle derisively, looking at the tumbled sofa and their scarlet faces.

Linda sprang to her feet with an exclamation of profound annoyance. She went and stood on the cold hearth, trying to get possession of her shattered equanimity; and Patsy said to her: "Why don't you light that thing? It's freezing cold in here. I should think you'd be congealed. Cousin Harriet wants you to come home. I've been looking all over the island for you. I thought of course you were at Juniper Cottage with Mr. Chadbourne, but he said he hadn't seen you in 'donkey's years.' Mrs. Chadbourne was out walking in the rain, and he looked sad and lonesome, so I asked him to come with me. But he said he couldn't because he didn't want to get wet. It's just as well he didn't come with me," she added, looking at the sofa with a grin.

Laurie found his voice. "I assure you, Patsy-Watsy," he said cuttingly, "that we were not doing anything we shouldn't."

"Oh, no, of course not!" sweetly.

"Look here, you little imp!" said Linda not unkindly—coming to her lover's aid, "you've got this all wrong. As Laurie says, it's all okay. We wanted to be alone this afternoon; but now, as you've found us, you might as well know what's up."

"You don't have to tell me," muttered Patsy with a blush, "I know! You're engaged, or something, aren't you?"

Neither of them said anything. Linda looked at the streaming windowpanes, and Laurie looked at Linda. Patsy added hopefully: "Can I be a bridesmaid?"

Linda trembled suddenly and a hot tide of colour swept over her face. Her eyes were smarting with unshed tears. They did not know that she was crying because she kept

her eyes pinned on the sullen sky and the rain-filled ocean. She spoke, and her voice had a hidden sob in the middle of it. "Yes, Patsy," she replied gently, "you can be my maid-of-honour! Your my cousin, aren't you? Who else would I have?"

Without a word, Laurie got up off the sofa and took Linda in his arms. Linda protested, but Patsy said to her: "It's all right—I'm going now. What'll I say to them up the hill? Shall I tell them about—you-know-what—?"

"No. Don't say anything. Keep it dark," replied Linda. But she said it without much conviction.

CHAPTER XXII

MR. HESELTINE and Harriet were at breakfast. The morning was clear and serene and the dining-room table lay in a pool of sunlight. The silver coffee pot and the glass bowl in the centre of the table radiated little shafts of brilliance, and the sea below the window was as blue as the antique willow china scattered over the table. The morning was calm and unruffled; but Harriet wasn't. Although she was hiding it fairly successfully, her mind was full of grim forebodings and pangs of dismay.

Mr. Heseltine was reading the *Sunday Herald*, which was now two days old. Harriet suffered him to read it in peace for a while because Mrs. Angel was bringing in the sausages and the toast; but as soon as she was gone she exclaimed to her father without preliminaries that, as far as she was concerned, the whole thing was perfectly terrible.

"What's terrible?" asked Mr. Heseltine, lowering his paper for a moment.

"Do put that down and listen to me for just a moment," she urged him. "This is serious."

"What, dear?" he said blandly, "what's the matter now?"

"Linda!" said Harriet succinctly.

The old man looked a trifle startled, but he was only startled by her vehemence. Avoiding her eye, he let his paper fall to the floor and attacked his sausages. "What's she done now?" he murmured innocently.

Harriet replied with a scowl that Linda had done "plenty." She explained: "There's a rumour going around the island that she's engaged to Laurie."

"There's always a rumour to that effect," objected Mr. Heseltine mildly.

"This one is unusually persistent. And I'm afraid," she added gloomily, "that it's based on fact."

"Well, what of it?" returned her father after a moment with a guarded look in his eye. As she did not answer him, he added: "How do you know that it's based on fact?"

"Patsy told Clarice that she found them in a compromising position—I mean by that, they were kissing each other—and Linda admitted that she was engaged. It appears," added Harriet with a gleam of wintry humour, "that she has asked Patsy to be her maid-of-honour!"

"Oh, it's as serious as that, is it?" murmured Mr. Heseltine. "Well! well!"

Harriet drummed her fingers impatiently on the golden oak table, and stared at the flowers in the centre of the table with a moody frown. His paper momentarily forgotten, Mr. Heseltine ate his sausages and wondered what was coming next. It came with extraordinary vigour and determination a moment later:

"Her mother must be sent for," said Harriet flatly.

Mr. Heseltine calmly went on eating sausages. He was so undisturbed that he annoyed her mightily. She controlled her anger, however, because she had been telling herself for the last two days that losing her *sang-froid* would get her nowhere. Someone in the family must remain level-headed. Apparently her father did not yet realize how serious the whole thing was. His brow was

as unwrinkled as the sea beyond the window, and he went on eating sausages as though nothing had happened.

With a supreme effort at self-control she said: "I am going to Port Hard this morning and telephone Mary to come home."

Mr. Heseltine finished his last, and fifth, sausage, and retrieved the *Herald* from the floor. "You needn't bother," he told her with a smile, "because I've already done it."

Harriet gaped at him in astonishment. "W-when did you send for her?" she stammered.

"On Sunday. When the rumour became unusually persistent I thought she had better come home, and I sent Captain Angel to Port Hard with a letter."

"But—but how did you know *how* serious it was? Who told you?" she demanded angrily, wondering why he had not discussed the matter with her, or solicited her advice.

"Saturday afternoon, when she came back up the hill, Patsy swore me to secrecy and informed me that she had found Linda and Laurie kissing each other, and that they were engaged to be married. Patsy"—he added with a grin as he saw the unspoken question on her lips: Why wasn't I told?—"Patsy tells me everything."

Crushed and bewildered, Harriet rose from the table. So much went on without her knowledge! Mary had been sent for two days ago and her father had not even paid her the compliment to taking her into his confidence. A blush of mortification dyed her leathery cheeks, and her eyes smarted with tears of dismay. Her father caught the unnatural glimmer in her eyes, and he felt a little penitent.

"I'm sorry, Harriet!" he said kindly. "I would have told you if I had known that you were taking this thing so seriously. I sent for Mary because I thought Linda needed her."

Harriet said nothing further; and a moment later she walked out of the door into the crystal morning and left him to his own devices. He sighed heavily and returned

to his newspaper, which was unusually gloomy that morning and full of war and rumours of wars. He was deep in the editorial page when Linda made her appearance. She came into the room so quietly that he did not realize she was there until he looked up and found her standing on the other side of the dining-room in a pool of sunlight, gazing at him with a sad, vacant expression.

"Hallo, ducky!" he exclaimed. "Where are you off to this nice day?"

She was clad in a pair of dungarees and rubber-soled canvas shoes. Her hair was bound with a piece of ribbon, and her old sweat shirt was tied around her middle by the sleeves. It was obvious that she was bound somewhere.

"Are you going painting this morning?" he added cautiously.

"Oh, no," she replied, sitting down in front of the coffee pot. She poured herself out a generous beaker full of black fluid, and said: "I've given that up, for the time being, anyway. I'm going sailing."

"Where to?"

"Oh, I don't know. Some island, I suppose. Want to come along? It's a lovely day."

The invitation was merely a matter of form. He never went sailing any more in tiny racing sloops. He did not even bother to answer her, but said: "You'll be careful, won't you?"

"Why, yes, Grandpa! Of course!" she replied in astonishment, wondering at his sudden solicitude. "You're not nervous about my boat, are you? You never have been."

"No, I'm not nervous about the *sloop* . . . but I'm a little anxious about you, my dear. If you can keep your mind on what you're doing, you'll be perfectly safe. Remember, that sloop's narrow in the beam, she carries a lot of sail, and she's as nervy as a thoroughbred horse. All that I ask you, is, keep your mind in the boat."

"Yes, Grandpa," she said meekly.

"You'd better go quickly," he added, "before Harriet

finds out what you're up to. Like most of the island, she does not approve of that sloop."

Linda, who was touchy on the subject of her sailing technique and who resented criticism of her sloop, made an unflattering remark about the island population in general and her Aunt Harriet in particular, and rose. She gave her grandfather a lingering kiss on the top of his head; and went out via the kitchen where she picked up a cold lobster, some bread, and two bananas. Stuffing them into a paper bag, she went out into the clear morning with a defeated expression. Her one thought was to get away from the island for the whole day. Only in that way could she hope to rest her tortured nerves and recover some of her shattered peace of mind. Port Hard and Rockland were out of the question—it was a lovely morning and the ferry would be crowded to the gunwales with small children and women on their way to the general store. What she wanted was privacy; some lonely unfamiliar beach where she could lay her head down upon the sand and weep without fear of discovery.

And the only way in which she could reach some distant island, quickly and privately, was in her own boat.

The sloop was not moored with the other sailing dinghies and cat boats near the ferry landing; it was farther on down the island. As she passed the turnout to Juniper Cottage her heart slipped into her throat, but she walked resolutely on. She had not seen Nicholas—nor had he made any effort to see her—since the fatal Wednesday when they had travelled to Rockland and back. Edwina had come to the Big House once or twice without him, and it was common knowledge that he was hard at work on his oil painting of Singing Beach.

Her outhaul was tied to a pine tree on the shore; and she undid the ropes with trembling fingers and pulled her little dinghy towards her with slow, tired motions. The *Altair* was moored well off shore; she took no chances on losing her on the rocks in a storm. The boat was her pride and delight; and as she looked at it a little ripple of

pleasure stole across the gloomy surface of her weary mind. At the moment it seemed as though the *Altair* alone remained among the pleasures of her former life; the mere thought of a paint brush made her want to cry, and her joy in Nicholas had turned to Dead Sea fruit.

She heard—or thought she heard—someone shouting her name; but as the voice sounded oddly like Nicholas' mellifluous English accents, she kept resolutely to her oars and pulled away from shore—because it couldn't possibly be Nicholas. He was out painting somewhere—he was on Singing Beach.

"Linda! What the devil! Don't you hear me?"

Linda stopped with her oars in mid-air. There was no denying it this time—it *was* Nicholas.

Her heart gave a sickening lurch.

Nicholas came crashing out of the woods. His voice floated out across the water. "Come back here! I want to talk to you." His voice had a note of imperiousness in it that made her feel helpless with emotion. "If you don't come," he added, "I'll swim."

She turned the dinghy around without a word and rowed back to the shore. He caught the prow of the boat in his hand, and instead of beaching it, he shoved it off again and hopped in. "Go on!" he commanded, "keep rowing."

"Why?" she jibbed.

"We'd better get off the island," he said grimly, "if we want any privacy. If we don't put out to sea, someone is bound to catch us in a compromising position and circulate a rumour about us."

The dryness in his voice made her flush crimson. Avoiding his eye she muttered: "What have you heard about me, and who told you?"

Nicholas merely laughed and would not answer her. "Row on, Macduff!" he urged her briefly.

"Do you expect me to row you all day?" she retorted indignantly.

"No. We're going out in your sloop."

"I've only got lunch enough for one."

"Then we'll feed on the 'milk of paradise.'"

Linda shot him a disturbed look, but kept on rowing out to the *Altair*. She prayed that no one was watching them from the island; and she wondered nervously where Patsy was. Nicholas climbed neatly aboard the sloop and proceeded to busy himself with the sails; but Linda was too overcome with emotion and nervous terror to appreciate the nimble way he was unfurling the jib and running up the mainsail. Before she quite knew what was happening to them the *Altair* was moving sedately out to sea with the dinghy bobbing along in its wake.

The early morning ripple had changed to a brisk wind, and as they came out from under the lee of the island the boat heeled over abruptly, with swanlike precision; the sails filled; and they were borne rapidly and sibilantly out into the blue Atlantic. Speech was impossible over the rush of the water and the hum of the wind; it was not until they were several miles beyond Camel Island that Nicholas spoke, and then it was only to ask her where they were going. Linda pointed ahead of her mutely; and peering around the billowing jib, Nicholas caught sight of a narrow strip of land covered with fir trees. "Manitunk!" she told him in a loud voice. Nicholas was a trifle alarmed at the rate they were going. The *Altair* had been designed for speed, not comfort; and the narrowness of her beam and the square footage of her canvas, together with her amazing speed, appalled him a little. He kept his eye well fixed on the direction and velocity of the wind during their swift passage out to sea. The starboard gunwale was awash; and noting the expression of patient anxiety on his face, Linda changed her course a bit and nosed her up into the wind. The boat, as usual, had given her a feeling of wild exhilaration. However, she kept her hand sensibly on the tiller and her head in the boat. On the way out Nicholas had little cause for his perturbation.

Linda made for the wooded end of the island, and dropped anchor a few yards off shore. In the sudden

silence that followed her exhilaration died and a deep, acute spasm of self-consciousness took its place. The air was charged with suspense. With an awkward gesture she got into the dinghy and resumed the oars; and Nicholas followed her without saying a word, his face rapt in thought.

The beach was warm and full of sunlight. From the other side of the island, which was not very wide, came the rhythmic splash of the open sea and the plaintive cry of a gull. The shadows of the conifers were cool and deep and restful after the brilliant glare of the ocean; and Linda walked towards them gratefully and sat down. She could not look at Nicholas; whenever her eyes veered towards him her heart began to palpitate and flutter and there was a gone feeling in the pit of her stomach. After a moment or two he came and sat down beside her, hugging his knees and looking wordlessly out to sea. It seemed very odd, but they had hardly spoken since they met at ten o'clock, and it was now high noon. She opened her mouth to say something ribald to that effect, but Nicholas forestalled her.

"Look here!" he exclaimed sharply, "I suppose you wonder why I came after you this morning?"

She stammered something inaudible. Clear speech was impossible because her heart was in her throat.

Still looking at the blue water in front of him, Nicholas said forcefully and bitterly: "Are you going to marry that fellow Channing?"

"Sure, I guess so . . ." she answered in a faint voice. And then she added with feeble levity: "What's it to you?"

Nicholas did not answer her. For once his face was neither flippant nor chillingly reserved; emotion—and deep emotion at that—was written in every line of his face and blazed in his eyes with a white, indignant fire. His voice was harsh and vibrant with dismay and perturbation. It was quite obvious that she had upset him

profoundly. Linda gazed at the sea incredulously, torn between fright and suffocating joy.

"How did you know?" she asked him in a small voice. "You haven't been up the hill in days . . . you haven't seen any one."

"People have been to see me," he replied tartly. "Patsy was kind enough to bring me the news that you were engaged."

"Patsy! She has her nerve."

"Don't you think you might have brought me the news yourself? Wouldn't that have been more polite?"

"Sure, I guess so . . . But I still don't see why you give a damn."

"You don't?"

"No!" she grinned. It was amazing to her that she could carry on this sort of a conversation when her heart was in such a tumult. Nicholas said promptly, with a mixture of withering scorn and unconcealed disgust:

"Then you're a fool!"

Linda answered him with a laugh which might mean anything, and lay down upon the sand with her eyes on the wide and cloudless sky. The laugh seemed to infuriate Nicholas, who said:

"I thought you had more sense than to go and lose your head like that. The whole thing's unworthy of your intelligence. My God! Look here, my dear! If you go on like this anything is liable to happen. If you go off the deep end now——"

"I'm not going off the deep end," she reminded him pertly. "I'm getting married."

"Don't interrupt me. You know perfectly well what I mean."

"Do I?" she parried, with a sudden burst of courage.

Nicholas's voice was stony. He would not look at her, but kept his eyes on a wandering snipe at the edge of the beach. "Yes, you do."

After a pregnant silence he added: "There's no use in lying to me. What's the sense? We're out here alone

on this God-forsaken island, and no one will hear your confession but that little sandpiper out there—*you're not in love with that boy.*”

“How do you know I'm not?”

Nicholas would not answer the question. In reply he said angrily: “And you'll be all kinds of a fool if you marry him!”

Linda sat up again with a cry of dismay and indignation. “I object to that statement!” she flared. “Laurie's a swell person. He's got a heart of gold, and I simply adore him. I know what I'm doing! Why the hell shouldn't I marry him?”

“Plenty of reasons. You'd be a donkey if you did.” He thought a moment, and then he said more calmly: “Do you remember the days we had at Fiddler's Beach—at the lighthouse—at Singing Beach—Do you remember all those days when you painted like someone possessed? Remember? Have you forgotten that sketch you did at Fiddler's Beach of the fog? Well, I haven't. That fog moved, Linda. And those lupines you painted were gay and alive. Oh, my dear! Don't be a little fool. You've got something there—stick to it! Don't get married yet.”

Linda's voice floated out beside him. “But I'm in love with him!”

“No,” said Nicholas, “you're not.”

The lapping of the water seemed very loud. The sandpiper hopped along the beach on bright yellow legs emitting plaintive cries, and the wind soothed peacefully in the conifers. From the direction of the mainland came the faint put-put of a lobster boat. That was all—there was no further speech from Nicholas or any other sound to disturb the dreaming quiet around them. Nicholas folded his arms across his knees and looked out across the water. There was the glimmer of a sail among the islands down east, and he watched it with mounting interest. Linda was too upset to argue any further with him; and his mind, anyway, seemed to be entirely occupied with the ap-

proaching sail. Finally he said to her with a nod down east: "Look, Linda! What's that?"

"Lumber schooner," she replied briefly.

He watched the schooner draw nearer and nearer, and then he exclaimed with pleased astonishment: "She's got all sails set!"

Linda turned her head. It was the *Millie T. Phelps*, out of Eastport, Maine, with a cargo of wood and potatoes for Georgetown, South Carolina. In spite of the mundane cargo in her hold, the *Millie T. Phelps* moved along the coast with the dignity and presence of a clipper ship. There was something majestic and inspiring in the romantic flow of the waves against her weatherbeaten bow and the proud set of her dingy sails. What had once been the glory of American shipping was now reduced to plying lumber between the North and the South; but there was enough dignity and drama left in the old schooner so that Nicholas gave a deep murmur of appreciation.

"Lord! but she's lovely."

"I wish I were on board her," said Linda truthfully.

"So do I . . ."

"I'd like to sail on and on, around the Horn, around the whole world."

"I thought you wanted to get married," he reminded her softly, with a grin.

There was no answer. He tipped his head forward so that he could look into her eyes, and was dismayed, but not surprised, to find that they were full of tears. He did not comment upon the fact, however, until she asked him for the loan of his handkerchief; and then he said quietly:

"I beg of you, Linda—don't be a fool."

"You're not in love with him," he added again.

"How do *you* know?" she muttered feebly. "You've never seen us together, have you? What makes you say that?"

Nicholas made no reply. He would not look at her, but kept his eyes on the disappearing lumber schooner as

though he wished heartily that he could sail on board a ship. She repeated the question with more vigour, and after æons of time he turned his head and looked at her. A magnet seemed to draw them together. He held out his arms and she went into them without a word, and their lips met.

"That's why," he said, letting her go again.

After that he buried his head in his hands with a groan. "Oh, God! what have I done now?" he said under his breath. To comfort him Linda said philosophically:

"Never mind! This was bound to happen sooner or later, I suppose." She was jubilant but unnerved. Her eyes filled with tears again, and she dried them on the huge square of lawn he had given her in lieu of her own missing handkerchief. She saw the monogram in one corner and examined it thoughtfully. As on the cigarette case, the large "N" was surmounted by a crest. She gave the handkerchief back to him, saying a little derisively: "What's that stand for—'N' for Napoleon?"

He snatched it away from her with a mutter of protest: "Here! give me that." And before she could ask him why everything he had was marked with coronets, she found herself in his arms again and he was kissing her firmly, and with passion.

"Don't ask questions," he murmured in her ear after a moment. "Don't ask the 'why' of anything. I want to hold you in my arms like this for a little while, and please don't ask me whether it's good or bad, or why I'm kissing you. . . . In a little while I must stop doing this, and never think of such a thing again."

Then he kissed her, as Laurie in all his ardour had never kissed her.

Looking down at her he said with an expression of pain: "Dear God! how young you are. . . . Just a child, a little girl really. When we have youth we squander it," he murmured not very originally, "and by the time we have any sense we're too old to care."

"Too old to care? Are you, Nicholas?" she asked teasingly.

"No, I didn't really mean that. . . . 'Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, The last of life, for which the first was made.' . . ."

"How I wish I could . . ."

"Yes, but you can't . . . you see, there's a reason."

She supplied it for him quickly: "You don't have to explain. You're married . . . that's why. Oh, Nicholas!"

Her voice sounded a little shocked. She added: "You'd have to divorce Edwina to marry me, and I wouldn't have you do that for the world. I'm not taking any woman's husband away from her. I'm not quite that much of a b——!"

She pulled herself out of his arms and he let her go. His face was troubled and drawn with unhappiness, and his eyes were deep with suppressed emotion. He wanted to say something and couldn't. He kept biting his lips in his distress to hold back whatever it was he wanted to say, and his head moved unhappily from side to side. Noticing his unusual pallor and the disorder in his eyes, she said to him regretfully:

"The whole thing is my fault. I've been running after you. You couldn't help yourself."

Nicholas grew as grey as the sand under his feet. "What do you mean?" he asked sharply. "Who told you that?"

"Can't you imagine? . . ."

"Your Aunt Harriet?"

"Right the first time."

"Good God!" he said. "Has she told any one else?"

"No. At least, I hope not."

Nicholas was so horrified that he could not speak. She looked at him nervously and said: "Nicholas! How did you know that I was in love with you. *Was I* wearing my heart on my sleeve? What made you think that I——?"

"That day on Singing Beach," he answered slowly.

"I looked up from the picture I was doing and you were gazing at me with such a loving expression that I knew, then. . . . Your heart wasn't on your sleeve, it was in your eyes."

Linda sighed heavily, and murmured something about indecent exposure.

"Never mind," he told her with a laugh, "it was very charming. But you mustn't look at me that way again, ever. You'll give yourself away if you do. The island is so small," he added, "and they've so little to talk about, darling. . . ."

It was the first time he had called her his darling. She gave him a look of mingled rapture and pain. And throwing caution to the winds, he took her in his arms again and held her cradled against his breast so that he could look down into her eyes. They were full of a deep and almost reverent emotion, and their expression of childlike trust and adoration made him want to cry.

A tear actually flowed down one cheek, and she wiped it off with her finger, murmuring brokenly: "Oh, Nicholas! Oh, darling! Love me a little while this afternoon before we have to go back to the island, because it's all the loving I'll ever have. I do love you so—you're my heart's darling. You're so *grand*, somehow! You're so wonderful, so bright—and I'm so dumb. You know so much about things, and I know so little. Do you remember the night we came home from Rockland, and I walked behind you through the woods like a serving wench? I'd like to walk behind you all the rest of my life, just following you wherever you want to lead me . . ."

Nicholas interrupted her with something between a laugh and a groan. "Oh, you darling! Do you always make love this way, or am I the sole recipient of this flood of culture and passion?"

"Don't make fun of me, Nicholas."

"I've got to," he answered under his breath, "it's the only way. . . ."

It was long past noon. The wind had died during the

last hour and the heat was becoming oppressive. Nicholas looked at the brooding sky and said promptly that it was time to go home. "I don't like the look of it," he added. "There's a storm brewing."

Linda, who felt that there was more than a storm brewing on the wide Atlantic that afternoon, agreed with him that it would be sensible to go home. The light died suddenly, not only in the sky above her head, but in her soul as well. The end of the world had come. Never again this fainting sweetness, never again the strong male grip of his arms, or the smell of his tweed coat. Never again would Nicholas be hers, to love and cherish alone and unhindered. She wound her arms around him with a stifled cry; and gently but unflinchingly he began to tell her that it was the end of love, and that he was saying good-bye.

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. HESELTINE had been rather vague in his letter to his daughter-in-law, and she arrived in Port Hard during the late afternoon with more bewilderment than anxiety. The Captain gave her no hint of why she had been sent for so hastily. He was, in fact, strangely uncommunicative; but she laid his abstraction to the weather, which was looking particularly vicious at that moment. The sky to the southward was a dull, smouldering yellow, and anything might come of it before they reached the safety of the island. "Do you think we'll make it?" she asked him dubiously as she boarded the ferry. The Captain, after giving her a strange look, said flatly: "We've got to make it."

And before she could ask him why the trip was so urgent he had vanished into the pilot house and started up the engine. A moment later they were headed out to sea. The remark upset her a little; but she forgot to wonder *why*

they must get to the island in wondering simply if they ever *would* get there.

Short, ominous little gusts of wind were beginning to chase each other over the leaden water, and she recognized them as a prelude to a nasty storm. The Camden Hills were still bathed in sunlight, but the sky over the ocean was suffering from some major disturbance; the clear blue of noon was now a jaundiced yellow tinged with darkness, and she heard—or thought she heard—the distant rumble of thunder.

Mrs. Heseltine was not really a timid creature, but she had one grave phobia—thunderstorms at sea. They frightened her more deeply than anything else in the world. She wandered uncertainly along the deck to the pilot house and rapped on the door. "Angel, dear," she said, as he answered her knock, "don't you think it might be more sensible to turn back to Port Hard? There's a frightful storm ahead. I'm not in any special hurry to get to the island."

"There's more than a storm ahead," he told her cryptically. "You go back and sit down. We'll make it all right."

"But I don't have to make it," she objected.

"Well, *I* do," he returned flatly. "What's goin' to harm ye—ye ain't scared, are ye?"

"The boat . . ." she murmured unhappily, "it's so old! It was thirty years old this summer."

"Are you tryin' to tell me my ferry ain't seaworthy?"

"Yes."

"Listen here! I could get to Newfoundland and back in this boat if I had a mind to. Her hull's as sound as the day we bought her. She ain't sprung a leak anywhere yet, and her engines are still firin' on all six cylinders—hear 'em? I could take this boat through any storm we could cook up around here. I'm sorry you're nervous, but there's no cause for anxiety. You'll be on the island in another twenty minutes, safe and sound."

The wind had risen forcibly now. It seemed to be

coming from every direction in gusts that flashed with lightning rapidity across the heaving water. The waves flowing past the boat were a strange, oily green, and the sky was now the colour of coal smoke. Mrs. Heseltine tried valiantly to think of something else, but her eyes kept wandering to the storm clouds far out to sea over Manitunk Island. The storm was already ravaging the sea out there; and after another clap of thunder—this was unmistakable above the throb of the engines—a heavy curtain of rain obscured Manitunk completely from view. Mrs. Heseltine gave a little shiver of nervous horror; and watched the rain and the wind creeping slowly towards the ferry like a pall of doom. The Captain gave a squawk.

"By gorry! I *never* saw you look so scared in my life! What'n hell's the matter with you anyway?" he jeered in disgust. "Your face is as white as a codfish. Ain't goin' to be seasick, are ye?"

Her answer was drowned in another, much louder clap of thunder; and, as the sudden gale of wind that followed hit the boat, the Captain momentarily forgot Mrs. Heseltine's terrors and put his whole attention on the wheel, which had begun to kick vigorously under the lash of the storm. The wind was so fierce that it blew little spits of water into the air as the waves rolled past the boat. Lightning danced all around them; any number of storms seemed to have met overhead; and between the roar of the wind and the crash of the thunder and the beat of the rain on the roof of the pilot house, Mary Heseltine could not hear the voice of common sense which was telling her firmly not to be afraid.

The Captain's voice joined in above the tumult. "This here boat only sprung a leak once in her life, and that time it wasn't the hull, it was the stuffin' around the propeller shaft. I got that all fixed up now—there ain't no cause for worry. I didn't know so much about her then, that time she leaked. I wasn't on to her contraptions as well as I am now. That was the night Linda was born, that time she leaked. She ain't never done it since."

He removed his attention from the sea for a moment and looked down at her with mingled sympathy and encouragement. "We've weathered a lot more'n storms together, you and me," he said with a shake of his head. "And we've always rode through 'em somehow. I got ye through childbirth, didn't I? What makes ye think I ain't goin' to get ye home now?"

"Where *is* home?" asked Mary Heseltine gloomily. Camel Island had vanished in a curtain of rain. They were enclosed on all four sides by walls of water, and the elements were making such a noise they could scarcely hear the foghorn at Blue Head, much less the bell buoy at the entrance to the harbour of the island.

"In about five minutes," he told her cheerfully, "I'm goin' to pick up that buoy without any trouble at all, and in another quarter of an hour you'll be sittin' in front of the fire wonderin' why the devil you were so scared."

She closed her eyes. She could not bear to look at the rain and the heaving water another minute. Crash after crash of thunder—the variety that splits the sky apart as a prelude to a deafening roar—resounded in her ears until she felt that she would rather drown than endure another minute of it. And then she heard the bell buoy. It rose, like the chime of cathedral bells, above the purgatory of the storm, and she gave a little sigh of thankfulness that was a prayer of release.

The harbour of the island looked untidy and bedraggled. Several little dinghies had slipped their moorings, the out-hauls had become hopelessly tangled, and some of the larger boats were in danger of going ashore. The Captain stayed behind to repair some of the damage, and she walked up the hill alone in the rain. There were evidences of the storm everywhere. The road was littered with twigs and small branches, and leaves were flying through the downpour, torn from the maples and the birch trees. The rain was still pouring down relentlessly, but she was so glad to have her foot on *terra firma* that she

did not care whether it was dry or not. Her feeling of security, however, was short-lived.

As she came to the top of the hill she heard her father-in-law's voice boom out over the noise of the storm, crying: "Here she comes, Harriet—at last!" There was an unmistakable note of profound relief in his voice, and it was quite obvious that something was not as it should be. When she reached the house she found him standing on the porch with his Paisley shawl thrown around him and his binoculars in one hand. "I was looking for you," he explained briefly, as though the binoculars needed some sort of an explanation. "Come in! come in! You're dripping wet and you must be chilled to the bone—Harriet! Tell Jessie to bring Mary some tea—she looks half-frozen."

"I was scared to death," explained Mrs. Heseltine, sitting down rather abruptly in front of the fire. "I've had an awful trip—the worst ever. I thought I was gone this time. Where's Linda?" she added then. "Don't tell me she's out painting somewhere in this downpour!"

"I don't know exactly *where* she is," replied Mr. Heseltine quite truthfully.

Harriet murmured something unintelligible, followed by: "Go on, Father! You might as well tell Mary. She'll find out sooner or later."

"Yes," agreed Mary Heseltine quickly and anxiously, "you might as well tell me, dear, right away. Why did you send for me like that? What's the matter? I suppose I should have come home before this. But I didn't think there was anything very wrong, because you said not to be alarmed, and not to hurry. What *has* happened?"

"Plenty," said Harriet lugubriously. "And a lot more has happened since we sent for you. Thank God you came when you did. To-morrow might have been too late." Mr. Heseltine objected, but she went right on.

"We sent for you because the rumours that Linda had made up her mind to marry Laurie were terribly per-

sistent—and we thought you'd better come home. That was the only thing that was the matter when we sent for you. But now—there's something else. We're not really worried, but . . . we think you ought to know, just the same, where Linda is."

"Good heavens!" cried her mother with mingled panic and dismay. "Don't tell me she's eloped!"

"No," said Harriet, "she's out in her boat."

Mrs. Heseltine gave a little cry and sank down into her chair. Her face was utterly drained of colour, and her eyes had a stricken look. As though she were really drowning this time, her whole life swept across her vision, and from the tumult one thought emerged:

"I've lost them both—my husband and my child. Oh, God!"

Harriet added kindly: "Don't jump at conclusions, Mary. It's early in the day, still. She may have had sense enough to put in somewhere until the storm was over."

Mr. Heseltine cleared his throat loudly, and added in a rather wavering voice: "I don't think she's in any harm, Mary. The child has a good head on her shoulders. I told her when she left to keep her mind in the boat. She——"

Harriet gave a cry. "You told her——? Do you mean to say, Father, that you knew she was going out in that boat, and you let her go?"

"I let her go," he nodded, adding stubbornly, "Why not? Why shouldn't I let the child go? There isn't a man on this coast who can handle a sloop any better."

"But it's a *racing* sloop!" protested Mary feebly, with a gasp of pain. "It's narrow in the beam, and it carries a frightful amount of canvas——"

"It's tricky," put in Harriet indignantly.

"And it's *too fast!*" concluded the frantic mother, beside herself.

Mr. Heseltine murmured something encouraging, and stared gloomily out of the window at the teeming rain.

The truth of the matter was that he was terribly conscience-stricken. He wondered whether his little duck had been able to keep her mind in the boat. Her face that morning had seemed extraordinarily pensive. While he was cursing himself for such bad judgment the front door opened noisily, and Captain Angel entered the room. He looked at them all with a twisted smile and said:

"Well, what are we going to do about it? Send for the Coast Guard or go out after her ourselves? We gotta do somethin' quick, before it gets dark."

Harriet said in a shocked voice: "Don't tell me *you* knew she went out in that boat and didn't stop her!"

"She won't listen to anything I say," retorted the Captain. "If I'd 'a told her not to go out in that boat this mornin', she'd have told *me* to go to hell!"

An argument followed as to the advisability of sending for the Coast Guard. All of them dreaded that last, frantic resort, because it was an admission that they feared and believed the worst. No one ever sent for the Coast Guard unless the situation was really serious—it was like calling in the eminent surgeon when every one else has given up hope.

"Why'n't you let me have a look for her?" said the Captain finally. "I'll hunt around for her a while, and if I don't find her right away I'll go down to Blue Head and tell 'em to put out a search. It's early in the evenin' yet—she may be on her way home now. I wouldn't worry too much. Linda's an awful fool about some things, but she *does* know how to handle a boat."

Harriet muttered: "That's all right, if her mind wasn't on something else." The Captain moved towards the door and they all said to him with one voice:

"Hurry!"

Night began to fall prematurely because of the density of the ceiling overhead; and as the dark fell their misgivings rose. Mr. Heseltine wandered around the porch with his binoculars until the dusk drove him in again; and as he re-entered the room his face was so harassed

that Harriet, unexpectedly, said that they had all better have a drink. While she was chopping ice in the pantry, Julie Channing arrived. Julie's face was almost as white as theirs.

"Look here!" she said immediately, "is there any truth in the rumour that Linda is out in her boat? How did I know? By the grapevine system. I was on my way to the Gayly house and I met Sam. He said the Captain had sent for him to go and hunt for Linda. I wondered why you didn't send for the Coast Guard. The ferry hasn't much speed."

"Well, we weren't sure enough that something awful had happened," replied Harriet. "Linda's a good sailor, you know—we doubt very much if she has upset. But Father was getting a little anxious, so the Captain offered to go after her."

Julie was strangely pale. She looked at them all indecisively, and then collapsed into a chair without speaking, as though she had changed her mind. But Mary, who was more observant, and a better psychologist than the other two, knew what she had felt like saying and said it for her:

"Laurie was always nervous about that sloop of Linda's. But—thank God!—he's not here. He doesn't know she's out in it."

Julie gave a shudder and said: "Do you suppose I could have persuaded her not to go out in it this morning? Doubtless I should have tried."

"Did you know she was going out in it?"

"Yes, someone told me."

"My God!" said Harriet, "everybody knew it but me."

Her father told her mildly that even if she had known that Linda was going out in the sloop it wouldn't have done her any good, because Linda was not in the mood to listen to anybody when she left. They all went in to dinner, Julie included, and sat down morosely to a boiled lobster apiece. Through the windows of the dining-room

could be seen the angry dregs of the storm fading in sullen greyness above a restless ocean. The light died gradually and the island was plunged in darkness. While they were eating strawberry shortcake the front door opened again and Clarice joined them. The rumour, it seemed, was all over the island by now. Without preliminaries she asked them if they had sent for the Coast Guard, adding: "Don't you think it's about time? The wind died ages ago, and she hasn't come home yet. It's black night out there. Angel Face will have a hard time finding her alone."

"The wind . . .," said her uncle helplessly, "I didn't know it had gone down."

They went back into the living-room and Harriet sensibly began to play the radio. The strains of a jazz band from Montreal flared into the room, but she cut it off again with an imprecation and twisted the dials until she found something more soothing to the nerves. The only symphonic music on the air at the moment happened to be *Tristan*, which seemed hardly suitable under the circumstances, but she left it on because there was nothing else; and looked up from the dials just in time to see Edwina Chadbourne standing in the door, in a dripping raincoat, with her shoes caked with mud.

"Edwina!" they all said in one voice, astonished.

Her face was ghastly. She was hatless, and her dark hair was flying around her white face. There was a smudge on one cheek where a branch had struck her during her passage through the night, and the knuckles of her right hand were bleeding. She swayed in the lamp-light like a paper-white birch in a storm.

"Nicholas!" she cried huskily. "Where is he?"

Nobody answered her immediately, because they were all shocked into silence. She looked at them tearfully, her face wild and pleading. Finally someone echoed: "Nicholas! Was he supposed to be here? We haven't seen him. What's the matter with you, Edwina, for God's sake——?"

She gave a little despairing exclamation, and they all thought she was going to faint or become hysterical. Mr. Heseltine was the first one to regain his senses. With a sudden gesture he pushed her down into a chair and ordered brandy. "What's the matter, my dear?" he asked her kindly but firmly. "What has happened to Nicholas?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him all day," she answered in a stifled voice, causing a sensation.

Unaware of the havoc she was raising in their minds she added: "That's why I came here. I thought you might know."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Heseltine, who was much more concerned over her frightful pallor than the fact that Nicholas—as well as Linda—was missing. He caught sight of her bloody knuckles, and he gave another cry of dismay:

"Harriet! Fetch the iodine! Edwina's cut herself!"

Edwina explained that she had done that at Singing Beach while climbing down the boulders in search of Nicholas; and every one said to her indignantly and crossly because their nerves were on edge: "Why didn't you come here first?"

But none of them had the courage to add: "We'd have told you where he was."

Edwina replied in a calmer voice that it had never occurred to her that Nicholas was lost, because she had taken it for granted that he was on Singing Beach, where he had gone to paint that morning when he left the house. It was not until the light began to fail that she had become really worried. The brandy was warming her vitals; and she grew more conscious of who was in the room and who was not. She looked around and said in an odd voice:

"Where's Linda? Why isn't she here? She may know where he is."

No one answered her because they heard the Coast Guard boat giving three sharp blasts down the hill at the

landing. Her ears were not trained to the sea as theirs were, and she had no idea what was happening. She cradled her brandy glass in her hands to warm it a little and she told them she was quite sure that Nicholas wasn't drowned because he was too good a swimmer.

"There's the boat, now," said Mary Heseltine in a stifled voice to the room at large.

Edwina asked, "What boat?"—and they all looked at her with various expressions of trouble, unhappiness, chagrin, and fright.

"The Coast Guard," replied someone feebly.

"The Coast Guard! Whatever for?"

As no one answered, Edwina added a little wildly: "What's happened—has someone drowned? Was there a wreck—?"

Mr. Heseltine assured her flatly that nothing very terrible had happened, but his eyes betrayed him. Edwina jumped up and took his hand with an exclamation:

"Linda! She went out in that boat! She's been out in the storm!"

Then her face grew deadly white. A look passed between them; and then Mr. Heseltine said in a loud voice so that she could hear him plainly over the tumult in her heart: "There is absolutely nothing to be worried about. Linda is perfectly capable of taking care of herself and any one else who might be aboard. Don't lose your head, Edwina, now!" he added in a voice of entreaty.

There was a scurry of footsteps on the porch and the door flew open. Linda stood there like an apparition from another world. She seemed to all of them like a Nereid risen unexpectedly from the depths of the sea. Her hair was lank with rain, and she was wearing a woollen over-coat which belonged to the Coast Guard, and her bare knees were bruised and torn.

"Linda! You're safe!" cried her mother with a sob of relief.

The girl brushed them all aside with a wild gesture. "I'm all right, but the *Altair*'s gone, and Nicholas——!"

She turned to Edwina with a frightened look and said: "Oh, Edwina, I'm sorry! I couldn't help it, really. There was a sudden squall as we went around the end of Manitunk—I didn't keep my head in the boat because I didn't jibe properly—but it's all right. Don't look at me that way! Nicholas isn't drowned—he hit his head on a rock—the Coast Guard says he's got concussion of the brain, but— Oh, Edwina!"

Edwina, however, was gone. Linda stared blankly at the darkness beyond the open doorway, and then began to cry.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE sky outside the window of Juniper Cottage was full of dirty, sullen clouds, as though the storm two days ago had remained to harry the island out of sheer spite. The air was chilly, and the house felt damp. Wondering what the storm had done to Edwina's garden, Nicholas raised himself on his elbow to look out of the window; but he sank back again with a groan as a sword split his head in two.

Edwina was beside him in a moment. Her eyes were dark with anxiety. "What's the matter, Nicholas?" she exclaimed. "I heard you groan."

"My head," he told her unhappily. "The damn' thing feels like all the hang-overs in the world put together. Sit down," he added, "I want to talk to you."

Edwina sat down reluctantly. She did not want to talk to him in the least. Nicholas said, holding her hand, so that she would not leave him: "I want you to tell me exactly what happened."

"Don't you remember anything at all?" she parried uneasily; adding: "I don't think you're strong enough to talk about this now. The doctor said that you were to be kept as quiet as possible."

Nicholas said: "I don't remember a thing after we left

Manitunk Island. We were sitting in the stern of the sloop, going around the point of the island, and the next thing I knew, I was in a Coast Guard boat with my head done up in bandages. What happened to the sloop?" he asked.

"She's lost," replied Edwina briefly.

"I supposed as much. Is Linda unhappy about it?"

"I don't know, I haven't seen her. They're keeping her in bed."

Nicholas subdued the alarm in his voice and asked casually whether Linda was suffering from shock or whether she had concussion too. Edwina murmured something about shock and exposure, and got up off the bed.

"I can see," he remarked, "that you're not going to tell me what happened to us. I think it's rather foolish of you, because I shall lie here and invent the most terrible stories. Why not tell me the truth?"

Edwina replied briefly: "I don't really know what happened. Why don't you ask Linda? She'll tell you."

Nicholas thought he detected a note of bitterness in her voice. He looked at her obliquely and saw that her face was pale and that her eyes were clouded; and he wondered if it wouldn't be a good thing to talk to her frankly, and get it over with. Before he could make up his mind to unburden himself Edwina turned and went out of the room. As she left, it occurred to him that she had not kissed him since the accident. Another sword slashed at his head, and he lay down with a groan.

Edwina went out into the garden. The morning was damp and chilly, and the scudding clouds overhead carried a freight of unshed rain; but even in the inauspicious light of a grey day the garden at her feet blazed with colour. It gave her little or no pleasure, to look at it, however, and she had only gone there because the house seemed too small to hold herself and Nicholas. She was standing there gazing over the tops of the flowers at the sullen sea, when Sam appeared from the woods on foot, with a letter and a bouquet of zinnias.

"These are from the boss," he said. As he had not been told to wait for an answer, he turned and walked away again.

Mr. Heseltine's letter was brief, and to the point. In it he said that he felt responsible for what had happened, because he had not persuaded Linda to remain on shore the day of the storm, and that—to ease his own conscience—he had sent for a brain specialist from Boston; adding: "I will of course pay the bill. Yours affectionately, Gerrard Heseltine."

Edwina walked slowly into the woods. She had an overwhelming desire to talk to him, to pour out several things which had been festering in her mind ever since the night of the storm. As she passed the stable, she heard Sam and the Captain discussing veterinaries; something was the matter with Lion, too, and her heart slipped; everything had gone to pieces during the last week, even the old horse.

Mr. Heseltine was eating a tardy breakfast alone in the dining-room. He greeted her with surprise and gratification, and told her to sit down. "Have a fish ball," he added, "they're especially good this morning."

"No, thanks," she replied, sitting down as bidden. "I don't feel much like eating."

"I shouldn't think you would," he murmured.

Edwina said slowly: "I got your letter. It was very kind of you, but I'd much rather you wouldn't send for a specialist. If you think Nicholas ought to have one, I'll get any one you suggest, but I must pay the bill. You've done enough for me as it is. Much too much," she added meaningfully.

"What have I done for you, my dear?—a few flowers—"

"No," said Edwina, cutting him off, "you've done a great service for me. You've made me think about a lot of things that seemed unimportant before I came here. That's why I want to talk to you. . . ." Her eyes brimmed with tears, and she looked out of the window at the sea.

Mr. Heseltine said: "I've been kind to you for purely selfish reasons. You brought something stimulating into my life. You're as refreshing to me as a breeze on the ocean, or a glass of wine. I am the one who should be grateful."

Edwina went on as though she had not heard him. "I should have come to you weeks ago, but I was too much of a coward. I feel simply beastly, and your hospitality and kindness have made me wretchedly unhappy. . . . When I came to the island I thought I could live without friendship—I'd been without it so long I didn't care. We never, never should have come here. But then, we didn't know what sort of a place it was. We should have found out—I see that, now that it's too late. And when you were so good to us, and so friendly, and so jolly and amusing, I didn't have the heart to go away again as I should have done. I couldn't bear to leave the island, because I felt at home."

Edwina dried her eyes, and said again: "You were so good to me, and I've been so beastly to you. I've violated your hospitality, and your friendship, and I don't deserve any of it."

Mr. Heseltine waited until she had finished, and then he said: "Are you by any chance trying to tell me that you and Nicholas are living in sin? Is that it?"

Edwina grew deathly pale.

He helped himself to another fish ball, adding: "Because if you are, don't bother."

"How did you know?" she asked him in a strangulated voice.

"I'm very clever at these things," he replied. "I've known you weren't married to him ever since the first afternoon you had tea with me."

"Did I give myself away?" she exclaimed.

"No, not really. I think it was more a certain intuition on my part. I knew something was wrong, and tried to figure it out and came to that conclusion. It seemed the only valid reason for your not living in England."

"There's more to it than that," she murmured.
"There's Gertrude."

"And who is Gertrude?"
"Nicholas's wife. She won't give him a divorce,
because——"

"She's in love with him still, I suppose?"

"No. She wants Prince Setton. That's the real reason
she won't give him a divorce, because she wants to keep
on being the lady of the manor. Gertrude is an awful
snob. She likes the title."

"And you, of course, don't give a damn."

"I've got one," replied Edwina.

She added: "But I *would* like Prince Setton. It's one
of the loveliest places in the shires. Nicholas adores it.
Keeping him away from Prince Setton was the cruellest
thing Gertrude could do to him, and she knew it."

"But, good heavens!" objected Mr. Heseltine, "it was
his home—I don't see how she could keep him out of it."

"Oh, she was rather clever about that. She told him
that she'd divorce him and mention me as co-respondent,
unless he let her live at Prince Setton. Nicholas," she
added dryly, "is the soul of chivalry. He couldn't let
her do that, so—he lost Prince Setton."

"However, he got *you*." Mr. Heseltine drummed his
fingers on the edge of his plate, adding: "What a creature
that woman must be. What, if any, are her antecedents?"

"Just not 'county.' She was terribly ambitious
socially, and the war came along and made it easier for
her to realize her ambitions. She met Nicholas one night
in London when he was home on leave from France, and
she made up her mind that she was going to have him.
He was an easy prey, because she was the first English-
woman he had seen in months. He married her right
after the Armistice. I suppose he was in love with her,
but he may have done it out of chivalry. I don't know
—but anyway, there's Gertrude."

"Still! After all these years?"

"Yes. We've been waiting ten years, now, for her to

give Nicholas a divorce. It seems incredible, doesn't it? When we ran away together, Nicholas was confident that she'd get tired of living alone in Prince Setton, but she hasn't. She's as tenacious as a limpet. I hoped she'd fall in love, but she hasn't done that either."

Mr. Heseltine poured himself out another cup of black coffee, and said: "I can't understand why your family let you run off with Nicholas like that, without benefit of clergy. Didn't they try to stop you?"

"Oh, yes. But I was terribly in love, and I had a mind of my own. There wasn't much they could do about it."

Mr. Heseltine added: "If Linda tried it, I'd stop her. Not for moral reasons, you understand, but simply because the sort of thing you're going through is impractical. It's not life—it's a tragic substitute for it. *Ersatz.* You should have been told that."

"People blamed me for taking Nicholas away from Gertrude," she went on, "but she wasn't in love with him, nor was Nicholas in love with her. They had nothing in common. Gertrude likes bridge and bazaars, and Nicholas doesn't care anything for society. He wanted to be a painter, and she wouldn't hear of it. He was miserable—"

Mr. Heseltine interrupted her. "Don't try to rationalize what happened. It doesn't matter now. What *does* matter is your present situation. You and Nicholas are living in what most people would call 'sin.' As a result, you are social pariahs. You move to a new place, and all goes well until someone finds out about you and then there's trouble. You are anticipating trouble now, I suppose."

"I didn't come up here because of that, I was only beastly sorry for what I had done. I've never felt quite this way before. I was sorry when people found out and snubbed us, but I was never ashamed of letting them think I was 'Mrs. Chadbourne.' But now, you've made me feel shabby."

"Have I? That's too bad!"

"I'm very fond of you, you know," she mumbled.

The old gentleman looked at her across the table, and shook his head. "I cannot understand how your father ever let you run away with Nicholas. I like Nicholas; he has good manners and he's intelligent. But I wouldn't allow any child of mine to run away with him, because a *liaison* is an unfortunate substitute for marriage. I am not shocked at what you've done, merely sorry that it had to be."

She made no comment, and he added pointedly: "Do you understand what I mean? Linda must have all, or nothing. I would never allow her to run away from this house, if I could possibly help it."

Edwina grew as white as the linen tablecloth separating them.

"Come here, my dear!" he added gently. "I love you very much—you know that. And I don't want any harm to come to you. Let me kiss away that frown on your brow—it's very unbecoming."

C H A P T E R X X V

EDWINA glanced through the mail casually, expecting nothing but bills and circulars, and found a pearl-grey envelope, addressed in a large, sprawling hand, which made her heart turn over. The letter was addressed to Nicholas, and Edwina stared at it in dismay, with foreboding, wondering what it portended. Then she noticed the postmark, and she uttered a stifled exclamation.

Gertrude, it appeared, was in Bar Harbour.

She was less than a hundred miles away. She was here in America already. But why? Edwina stared at the envelope in perplexity, and her heart jumped nervously. Gertrude, in her usual dramatic fashion, had scrawled words at random across the envelope: "*Personal. If not there, please forward immediately. Urgent.*"

If it were that urgent, Edwina supposed, she ought to

give it to Nicholas at once. But the brain specialist had warned her that he must be kept as quiet as possible for a few days, and that he must not be worried about anything. And Gertrude, decidedly, was a worry. Feeling rather dishonourable, Edwina opened the letter herself.

Nicholas, it began. Just like that, with no sort of prefix. She usually addressed him with cold formality as "Dear Nicholas," but evidently he was no longer her "dear," however formal. Her handwriting was so large that the letter, although fairly brief, covered three pages. Edwina read them in rapid succession, torn between surprise and hope. It was imperative for Gertrude, she gathered, to have a word with Nicholas immediately, about some matter of vital importance to them both. She concluded by saying that she would meet him in the lobby of the hotel in Rockland the following morning, and that he must be there *without fail*. Reading between the lines, Edwina could see that Gertrude was vastly agitated about something, because she had lost a great deal of the aristocratic *sang-froid* which she had been cultivating for so many years. Her letter was both incoherent and human.

She wanted something, and she wanted it badly.

Edwina wondered whether by any chance, after ten years of weary waiting, it could be the same thing she wanted herself. Had the moment come when Gertrude was in the mood to give Nicholas a divorce? That possibility seemed hardly likely now after so many years of stubbornness on the part of Gertrude, and despair on hers. Nicholas, however, was incapable of going to Rockland; and after a sleepless night of indecision, Edwina decided to go in his place, and not tell him.

She informed him simply that she was going to Rockland to buy a leg of lamb and some phosphate for the garden; and left on the early ferry. Just as they were casting off Linda came running down the hill respectably dressed in a yellow tweed skirt and a Shetland pull-over, followed by Sam with a brace of suitcases. Edwina grew a little pale and asked her where she was going. Linda

replied loudly and resentfully over the throb of the engines that she was going to Bar Harbour because her family thought she needed a change.

The knowledge that Linda was going to Bar Harbour, where Gertrude was, plunged Edwina into a nervous and troubled silence for the better part of the trip.

Linda was unusually silent also, because she wanted violently to ask how Nicholas was getting along, and didn't quite dare.

The sea was rough that morning and the ferry plunged about through the dark green rollers and put her nose under once or twice. Edwina remembered how nervous she had been during her first crossing on the ferry, and how unconcerned Nicholas and Linda had been. She remembered thinking at the time that Nicholas did not like young girls, and that it was rather odd of him to be so pleasant to this one.

Edwina's grey eyes were deep as she looked at Linda's solemn face. There was no hate in them, because Linda was not the type of girl who inspires supreme hate. Edwina's expression was one of fear and foreboding. Just as they were rounding the buoy at the entrance to the harbour of Port Hard, Linda turned to say something, and their eyes met.

Linda blushed uncomfortably, and looked down at her newly manicured finger-nails. Then she said with rare courage, in a low voice only just audible above the murmur of the sea: "I know you are mad at me, Edwina, and I don't blame you. Nicholas almost lost his life because of my stupidity. I'll admit that. But please don't blame me for taking him out in that boat in the first place. He came—I couldn't stop him. That part of it wasn't my fault."

Edwina replied evenly: "I'm not mad at you, Linda. What makes you think I'm angry with you? Nicholas has only got a slight concussion. I don't think his other wounds are mortal."

The girl flinched. Then all the colour ebbed out of her

face, leaving her white and silent. No, of course her lover's wounds weren't mortal. Because there was something he wanted more than he wanted her. She knew it, and Edwina inferred it.

Edwina said as the ferry neared the dock at Port Hard: "Nicholas keeps asking me what, exactly, happened when you upset. He can't remember a thing after you left Manitunk Island. He's very curious. I told him he'd better ask *you*; I don't know all the details. It must have been a terrible storm. Didn't you know when you left that you were running into danger?"

"No," said Linda, "I didn't."

"I suppose you were too preoccupied to notice what was happening," murmured Edwina as a parting shot. She sprang out of the ferry and ran towards the bus, which was impatiently tooting for her, before Linda could say anything in reply.

Once in the bus, Edwina temporarily forgot Linda, who was motoring to Rockland with friends, and began to think about Gertrude. During the eight-mile trip her spirits alternated between hope and despair; was Gertrude going to be reasonable, and give Nicholas his long overdue freedom, or was this a plan to get him to give her more money? Once or twice in the past she had asked for more, with no success. Edwina was inclined to think that that was what was the matter with her now, because Gertrude lived expensively. There was a large, streamlined Rolls standing outside the hotel in Rockland, surrounded by a group of admiring and curious little boys. Edwina knew at once that Gertrude was already waiting in the lobby of the hotel, for two reasons: the car bore an English licence, and it was exactly what Gertrude would buy in the way of an automobile because it was chic, modern, and expensive.

Edwina's heart gave a nervous flutter, and she felt slightly ill in the pit of her stomach. She wondered what Gertrude would say when she saw her. They had not met for nearly ten years, since the night when Gertrude had

called her names and told her abusively to get out of Prince Setton and stay out. Tentatively she mounted the steps of the hotel and peered through the door. Gertrude was standing indecisively in the centre of the lobby, looking strangely out of place and extremely chic. She was exhaling cigarette smoke in short, nervous puffs, and her apparent trepidation gave Edwina more courage. She pushed open the heavy glass door of the hotel and went in.

Gertrude uttered an exclamation when she saw her.
“Edwina. What are you doing here? Where’s Nicholas?”

“Nicholas couldn’t come,” replied Edwina with great calm, adding sweetly, “you said it was urgent, so I thought I had better come in place of him and find out what the trouble was. You seemed very upset about something.”

“No, no, not upset—I was merely anxious to talk to him. In fact, I *must* talk to him.”

“You can’t,” Edwina told her. “He’s got concussion of the brain.”

Gertrude looked a little frightened for a moment, and then she said: “Is he out of his head?”

“No, he’s all right. There’s nothing very wrong with him, but we have to keep him terribly quiet.”

“What happened? Was he in an accident of some sort?”

“He hit his head on a rock.”

“Why?”

“He was out sailing with someone, and they upset.”

“Oh, my!” said Gertrude. “What a shame!”

She seemed genuinely dismayed by the fact that Nicholas was confined to his bed, but Edwina suspected that it was only because of the inconvenience it was causing her. Gertrude hesitated a moment with a scowl, and then she said quickly: “Look here! Now that you’ve come I might as well talk to you.” Her eyes roved around the lobby, which was full of travelling salesmen smoking

five-cent cigars, and she said crossly: "Where can we go and sit down? This room is too crowded."

Edwina remembered there was a bar in the hotel, and suggested going there. They went down to it, and sat in a cubicle facing each other. Gertrude looked sharply at Edwina for a moment, and then opened the conversation by remarking that she hadn't changed much. "The life seems to agree with you," she said, adding, "however, I wouldn't say you looked happy."

Edwina assured her coolly that she *was happy*, but added that she was worried over Nicholas's concussion.

"I hope it hasn't knocked all the sense out of him," said Gertrude grimly.

A silence followed, during which Edwina looked at Gertrude, who was powdering her nose. The half-light in the bar was kind to Gertrude, and made her appear not much older than the woman Edwina had known as mistress of Prince Setton. Her hair was still the same burnished gold, and her complexion even now was pink and white, and her eyes a clear, lambent blue. She hadn't faded much, but then why would she, lapped in the luxury of Prince Setton? Edwina gazed at her, fascinated; there was a metallic air about her, as of yore, due to the bright gold of her abundant, fluffy hair and her steely blue eyes, and the hard line of her too-red mouth.

Gertrude, however, for the first time in history appeared a little nervous. Her cheeks were unnaturally pink under her rouge, and her *sang-froid* was not as hard-boiled as usual. She had lost some of her aristocratic demeanour, and her voice was a little uncertain. She ordered a brandy and soda for herself, and some coca-cola for Edwina, who was not in the mood for hard liquor, and then re-opened the conversation.

"Look here!" she said, "you'll have to talk to Nicholas for me, because I can't wait around here until he's well enough to see me. I'm only in Bar Harbour for the week—the yacht's going out again on Monday."

"Don't tell me you've bought a yacht, Gertrude!"

exclaimed Edwina, wondering how she had managed that on her allowance. Gertrude missed the faint leer in her voice and said blandly, with a slight flush:

"Oh, dear me, no! The yacht belongs to a friend of mine. He's chartered it for the month I'm in America, and we're going cruising. We're well chaperoned, you understand," she added hastily. "He's got his sister on board, too, so it's all right. The whole thing is perfectly respectable. Walter's intentions are quite honourable."

"And who, might I ask, is Walter?"

"Well, I suppose I might as well tell you. You'll know sooner or later."

She mentioned a name belonging to a tycoon of industry, a multi-millionaire. Edwina looked at her thoughtfully in silence, and Gertrude blushed again. "Yes," she said, "you're right. I can see what you're thinking. But Walter has asked me to marry him. And I've said yes, providing that Nicholas is sensible and lets me have my freedom."

"Lets you! What's to stop you getting it for yourself? Haven't you got enough evidence? Nicholas and I have been living together in sin for the last ten years—isn't that enough? I can't see why you had to come all the way to America to ask Nicholas for your freedom when you could have got it in England on the usual grounds."

Gertrude shook her blonde head. "No, my dear! You don't seem to understand. I'd have had to mention you as co-respondent, and Nicholas would never have allowed it. He would have contested the case and there would have been the most frightful row."

"That's nonsense," replied Edwina suspiciously. "We've been living together openly as man and wife—he couldn't contest it. There must be some other reason why you were afraid of a row with Nicholas about the divorce—what is it?"

Gertrude grew white instead of pink, and drummed her scarlet finger-nails on the table between them. She would not look Edwina in the eye. Somebody dropped

a nickel in a mechanical victrola on the other side of the room, and the machine began to play seductive popular music. Gertrude seemed to welcome the diversion. "Lovely tune, don't you think?" she said brightly.

Edwina said warningly: "Gertrude, you might as well tell me what's on your mind, because Nicholas musn't be bothered with anything just now. He's got enough to worry him as it is. One more thing, and he's apt to have a nervous breakdown."

"What's happened now?" asked Gertrude. "I knew you two weren't happy. I could tell from looking at you."

Edwina realized that she had made a mistake, and said quickly and angrily: "Nothing's the matter—I was thinking of his accident. His head pains him frightfully and he's been scared about himself."

"Sure there isn't another woman in the case?" asked Gertrude, cocking her head at Edwina with a smile. "It's about time."

She took another swallow of brandy and soda, and remarked that ten years was mid-channel—always a dangerous time. Especially so in Edwina's case. She concluded by saying that she had better marry him quickly before she lost him.

Edwina said to her: "Look here, Gertrude! You haven't explained why you wanted to see Nicholas in such a hurry. If it was that urgent you'd better tell me, because I have to get back to the island, and I've all my shopping to do."

Gertrude looked into her brandy glass and said: "All right, I'll tell you! I'm perfectly willing to give Nicholas a divorce in the usual way—hotel registers and all that sort of thing—I'm perfectly willing not to mention you as co-respondent—if he'll give me his mother's pearls. They're almost the finest pearls in England. I think he owes them to me," she added defensively, "after all I've been through. You tell him that I'm perfectly willing to let him go down to Bray with a stenographer, and get his divorce in a nice, decent way, if he'll let me keep the

pearls. I don't want a row any more than he does," she continued. "I've got Walter to think of. He can't bear a scandal of any kind. His first wife was perfectly terrible—ran away with a movie actor—he's got a horror of anything that isn't quite nice. I have to be careful about my divorce."

There was a long silence, during which Edwina looked at a cardboard list of beverages instead of at Gertrude, and the victrola played the waltz from "Snow White." When the tune ended she said quietly:

"What will you do if Nicholas won't give you a divorce? He mightn't, you know, just out of sheer spite."

"He wouldn't do that," replied his wife scornfully, "he's too chivalrous. He wouldn't do that because it would be mean to both of us. I've always had a suspicion," she added, "that he ran away with you because you were so terribly in love with him, and he thought it would be mean not to give you a thrill. I couldn't see any other reason why he'd give up Prince Setton. No man would leave a place like that for a woman, if he wasn't a sentimental fool."

"You never did understand Nicholas," replied Edwina calmly. "That was the trouble."

"And you told him that you did, I suppose," retorted Gertrude in an unruffled voice. "That's the best way to get a man. Always appeal to his injured feelings. You were a very clever young woman. You got him to read poetry and tell you about his art. You told him he'd be a great artist if he was married to a woman who understood him. It's the oldest game in the world, and strange to say it almost always works. The men are perfect suckers for it."

Edwina could not resist asking her if that was the way she had snared her Walter; and Gertrude naturally was highly indignant. She said haughtily: "Certainly not! Walter had been divorced three years when I met him. I've got nothing like that on my conscience."

There was a slight inflection of the word "my."

Edwina caught it but did not flinch. She met Gertrude's cold stare with implacable eyes. Gertrude shook her head and remarked:

" You always were a mystery. I never could make you out. So cold, so aristocratic! And Nicholas liked warm, cosy women—he was always talking about vitality. I never could see how you got on with him, but I suppose the little talks about art did it . . . I couldn't tell one picture from another. Maybe if I'd been sensible I'd have learned something about them, and I wouldn't have lost him—I don't know."

There was an unmistakable note of regret in her voice, and Edwina grew very white. Much as she disliked Gertrude she had to admit that her regrets were not all for Prince Setton—in her peculiar hard-boiled way she had been fond of Nicholas. " Look here, Gertrude!" exclaimed Edwina impulsively, " there's just one thing I'd like to say to you now before we go on. I'm not sorry I ran away with Nicholas, because I've been terribly happy with him. But if I had it to do over again, I don't know . . . I realize now how beastly it was of me to take him away from you. I'm older now—I know how you felt."

" Yes," murmured Gertrude thoughtfully, " you got him away from me without much trouble, didn't you? . . . You were just a slip of a girl with those big eyes of yours and that curly black hair, and I was almost eight years older than you were. I wasn't fresh and dewy any more, and that was what Nicholas wanted, I suppose. That, and someone to talk to about his art. Well, you've got him now! I hope you keep him."

She changed the subject back to the more pressing one of the divorce.

Evidently she was in a hurry. She wanted her freedom quickly, as soon as possible, and she said firmly that Nicholas must come back to England at once and give her the necessary evidence. When Edwina objected to her haste, and asked her why they must uproot themselves and return to England before the end of the summer, Ger-

trude replied that it was something to do with the Assizes in Waring—the court, it appeared, convened only once in so often and any delay on Nicholas's part would mean that the case would have to be held over, perhaps until the spring. Edwina suspected that at least part of her impatience was due to the fact that she was afraid of losing Walter.

Gertrude was annoyed by her objections. She looked at her in surprise and said: “ I thought you'd be in a great hurry for this divorce. My God! you've waited for it ten years. What's the matter with you? ”

“ Oh, I do want it, ” protested Edwina vaguely. “ Only I was thinking that Nicholas might not be strong enough yet to go through all that dreadful business, a week-end at Bray and so forth. He's had a bad concussion. I'll have to let you know what the doctor says. In fact, ” she concluded with more firmness, “ I shan't be able to tell him that you want a divorce until the doctor says I may. So you'll just have to wait a while. That is, if you want the pearls. If I were you, I think I'd go home now and get the divorce without even consulting Nicholas. You can mention me as co-respondent for all I care. ”

“ Ah, yes! ” said Gertrude, “ I can see your point there. He'd be bound to marry you after I'd mentioned you as co-respondent. He'd have to act like a gentleman, then. But I don't think I'll go about it that way, if you don't mind. I'd rather have the pearls. ”

Edwina did mind, violently. But she kept still because she was unwilling to admit her fear even to herself. She asked Gertrude testily why she had not told them she wanted a divorce last spring before they came to America. It would have been so much simpler for everybody concerned. Now they would have to go home in the middle of the summer.

“ And I don't want to go at all, ” Edwina told her crossly. “ I was having a nice time here; we've got a house, and a garden. ”

“ Good Lord! ” exclaimed Gertrude, “ I really believe

you don't want to go home to Prince Setton. I can't see why you don't want the divorce right away, but you've got some good reason for it—I can see that."

Edwina did not argue the point with her. She drank the rest of her coca-cola in silence, and let Gertrude pay for both drinks. Gertrude said in conclusion:

"Well, I don't suppose we'll see each other again, ever. I'll move out of Prince Setton as soon as I can and let you have it. I don't know how the County people will take to you after this—you'll probably find some houses are closed to you. But you've got to expect that. You pay for everything you get in this world. Maybe you'll be happy now—I don't know. At any rate I hope so. I hold nothing against you any more. All that's water under the bridge. As you say yourself, you were a little fool and you lost your head. It was lucky you ran away with someone like Nicholas—most men wouldn't have stuck to you this long. I'm a little amazed that he hasn't left you before now. I never thought he'd stick."

Gertrude rose, and drawing on a pair of immaculate white doeskin gloves with a preoccupied gesture she added:

"That was one of the reasons I wouldn't give him a divorce right away. I always thought, of course, that he'd come running back to me. It wasn't *all* Prince Setton."

CHAPTER XXVI

WHEN the ferry returned from its afternoon journey to Port Hard three days later, Harriet, who had come down for the mail pouch, was vastly put out to find Linda aboard. Presumably Linda was gone for ten days; and here she was sitting in the stern of the ferry boat looking even whiter and more forlorn than she had been when she left, with no plausible explanation of her return.

Harriet said to her as she climbed out of the ferry:

"Well, Miss—to what do we owe the pleasure of your company? You were bored, I suppose."

"No," said Linda with a strange vehemence, "far from it!"

"What's the matter? Didn't you have a nice trip?"

"No," said Linda again, with the same vehemence, "I didn't."

She added bitterly that she had had an extraordinarily rough trip in many ways, and Harriet cried with annoyance: "There you go, dramatizing yourself again! You know perfectly well you weren't having a bad time in Bar Harbour—you just like to think you were."

Linda made a weary gesture. "Oh, stop!" she said, "for God's sake!"

"Any excuse to get back to the island," added Harriet witheringly, with a cry of scorn. "You *are* a fool! You may be in love with Nicholas Chadbourne, but this is certainly no way to get him."

Linda looked at her broodingly, as from a great distance. She was too weary at that moment, and too bewildered, to care very much what any one thought of her. All she wanted was to be alone: to crawl into some corner and suffer in privacy like the animals. Animals suffered physical pain . . . but fortunately for them their suffering was never mental and spiritual. "How's Lion?" she asked with more emotion, remembering that he had been suffering when she left.

"Lion!" exclaimed Harriet awkwardly. "Why, didn't the Captain tell you?"

"No," said Linda, growing even whiter. She stared at her aunt in silence for a moment; and then her eyes filled quietly with tears and she turned and walked towards the road. Harriet let her go. There was something in the drooping expression of the girl's shoulders and her dragging footsteps which frightened her into silence.

Linda walked unhappily along the road, stumbling occasionally over the ruts made by Lion in his palmier days. Her face was white with misery. Dusk was already

gathering under the trees, and the stable lay in a pool of shadows. She pushed open the door and went in. They had cleaned Lion's empty stall and it was full of soft, bright hay. Over the manger was painted in a childish scrawl: THIS STALL BELONGS TO LION. She remembered the day, long ago, when she had climbed upon the manger with a can of red paint and put it there.

But the stall didn't belong to Lion any more. In a day or so it would belong to some other horse named Trixie, or Belle, or Major.

She lay down upon the straw and abandoned herself to her grief. It seemed like the end of the world. Anyway, it was the end of childhood. Her tears flowed with abandon and unrestraint into the slippery, fragrant, straw under her arms; and woe—held in bay all during her trip home from Rockland—finally overwhelmed her. Her woe was not centred upon any one thing she had learned in Bar Harbour nor upon the death of Lion—it was more a confusion of soul, combined with shock and the very natural pangs of romantic love. It was really the first time she had admitted to herself how very deeply she was in love with Nicholas, and the admission both appalled and alarmed her. She had thought for days—"This is something that will pass—*must* pass—because it is so utterly hopeless." But now it was no longer quite so hopeless, and she wondered . . . She raised her head from the damp straw and looked at the dark, cobwebby recesses of the stable roof over her head, pondering. Until now her Aunt Harriet's accusations that she had been running after Nicholas had been utterly unfounded . . . did she love him enough to risk having them become an actuality? The horror of it was that she was almost confident that Nicholas was in love with her, too . . . If she but raised a finger, now, he might come all too easily . . . And what of Edwina? Weren't there certain obligations in life even more binding than the vows of marriage? Marriage was a thing which could be broken in a Court of Assizes, but

the vows of one's own conscience could not be severed with quite such ease . . .

She had reached this point in her meditations when Sam entered the stable and brought them to an abrupt close. "Gorry, Linda!" he exclaimed in astonishment, "I thought you was in Bar Harbour!"

Linda scrambled to her feet with a muttered exclamation. In another moment he would ask her why she had returned home in three days instead of ten, and to fore-stall him she walked out of the stable quickly and took the road that led across the island. She wanted passionately to be alone until her griefs were less troublesome and her emotions were more under control and she could face the world again with equanimity.

After she had gone perhaps a hundred yards she heard two feminine voices belonging to her mother and Mrs. Gayly, and she darted into the underbrush and remained hidden until they had passed. Her mother looked calm an unworried; doubtless the news had not reached her yet that her erring daughter had returned from Bar Harbour ahead of schedule. Both women were carrying pails full of blueberries, and they were discussing clothes. They had been on an expedition to the farther end of the island where the blueberries were plentiful at this time of year. Linda watched them disappear around a bend, and crept out of the woods like a hunted doe.

Never before had she been so conscious of the smallness of the island. It gave her, that afternoon, a feeling of claustrophobia. The lack of privacy, and the difficulty encountered in trying to hide from the island population, made her turn her footsteps towards the one place where she was almost sure to be alone—Singing Beach. The road passed the turnout for Juniper Cottage; and she wondered how Nicholas was faring, but not for worlds would she have risked going to Juniper Cottage to find out.

She did not want to see Edwina—or Nicholas either, for that matter—until she had definitely made up her mind which way madness or honour lay. All she wanted, now,

was to be alone with the wind and the sky, to retire into the quiet shell of Singing Beach and abandon herself once more to her thoughts.

Also, she was frightened of meeting any one that afternoon, because her heart, quite definitely, was on her sleeve.

She hovered a moment in the cathedral calm of the pine grove above Singing Beach, listening to the voices of the wind in the dark canopy of needles above her head, and filling her lungs with the clean odour of the ancient trees. The opening hexameters of *Evangeline* came to her lips, and to her astonishment she found herself quoting them aloud. "I've caught the trick from Nicholas," she exclaimed, as a sudden warmth flooded her breast. She thought of all the wonder and the excitement he had engendered in her once pedestrian soul. The dark trees seemed more alive, and she could hear the rhythms in the boughs. He had made her aware—so terribly *aware*!

She moved on towards the glimmering sea and the bright sunshine.

The stillness lapped around her. Golden light was spilling over the amber-coloured rocks, tipping the little stunted pine on the cliff and gilding the sea. The quietude of the hidden beach as she stood above it among the boulders on the cliff was so heart-warming that she stood there for a moment drinking it in.

She floated, rather than walked, down through the boulders, wrapped in her own private Nirvana; and found her love sitting in the very middle of the beach with an easel propped in front of him and a huge wooden palette on one arm.

She uttered an exclamation and stopped dead.

With great self-possession, Nicholas laid down his palette and turned around and looked at her. The painting in front of him was only roughly blocked in, but already she could see the outline of her own body, and the bright, living blue of the sea with the crystalline sky above it, and the outstretched wings of the gull. She could

also see that Nicholas was not only painting well but brilliantly. There was a free, abandoned quality about his brushwork. One lightning glance was enough to tell her that Nicholas was painting what might very well turn out to be his masterpiece. Then her attention was occupied by Nicholas himself. Their eyes met, and clung.

"Well," she said finally, "I thought you were in bed."

"Otherwise," he replied with a nod, "you wouldn't have come."

"No."

"That would have been very silly of you."

"No, Nicholas—not silly. Prudent."

He had nothing to say to that, because he was shocked by her pallor and the large circles under her eyes. Her expression also frightened him because it was so mournful. She looked almost ill with fatigue, and he said dryly:

"You seem to have done yourself in completely on your trip to Bar Harbour. Late nights, I suppose, and plenty of champagne!"

"Yes," she replied with astonishing bitterness, "I'll say I did!"

She came down upon the beach and perched herself on a rock a little distance away from him but well within ear-shot. He said finally: "What do you mean by that statement, exactly? Doubtless you ran away from me when you went to Bar Harbour, but I cannot see why the expedition made you bitter—nor why you returned after four days. If you left me so precipitately, I cannot see why you did not stay away permanently until I had left the coast of Maine for good. You wouldn't have had long to wait," he added with a touch of her own bitterness. "I always leave places."

"What good would that have done?" she returned sullenly. "Do you think I could forget you that easily? . . . No," she continued in a low, resentful mutter, "I seem to be haunted by you, wherever I go. The little gods, whoever they are, won't let me alone. They seem to be

taking a fiendish pleasure in haunting me with the ghost of my unfortunate love. I suppose it's my own especial purgatory . . .”

“I wish,” said Nicholas, “that you would stop talking utter rot, and tell me why you are so caustic, and what, exactly, happened to you while you were away in Bar Harbour? In fact,” he added as he lit a cigarette with a nervous gesture and threw away the match, “there are a lot of things I would like to know!”

Linda swung her foot angrily to and fro, and looked out to sea. She was dangerously on the verge of tears.

Nicholas said—looking at her with growing alarm but anxious to find out one or two things before she began to cry—“No one else will tell me exactly what happened when the boat upset—I still don’t know why I’ve got concussion.”

“You hit your head on a rock.”

“So I’ve been told—but I have still to learn *how* I came in contact with a rock. No one will tell me that.”

“They won’t tell you because they don’t really know,” returned Linda with a scowl. “What the hell difference does it make?”

Nicholas thought a moment, and then got up and wandered over to her. Something in her expression made him realize that he must find out from her what had happened to him during the storm. A great deal depended upon it. As she sat upon the rock her eyes were on a level with his. He clasped his arms around her waist and held her so that she was forced to look at him, and said to her:

“Why have you told no one what really happened? I can remember leaving the island in the teeth of the storm, so it can’t be anything that happened on that beach before we left. It was something else. What was it, my dear?”

“We upset,” she muttered.

“Well, go on!” he urged.

She dropped her eyes, as though the truth not only embarrassed her but frightened her, and repeated haltingly: “We upset . . . near the point of Manitunk Island.

I hadn't jibed properly, and we went over. You didn't hit your head on a rock . . . the boom struck you, actually, as we went over . . . When I came to the surface I found you beside me with your head streaming blood, out like a light."

Nicholas put his hand under her chin and lifted it so that he could look into her eyes. "You saved my life, didn't you?" he said gently. "That was it! But why were you afraid of telling me?"

"Because I don't want you to think I'm a heroine." She did not add that she was afraid he might think, also, that he was responsible for her, or owed her anything in return.

The sea had been very rough when they upset, and he wondered by what miracle she had saved him. He was so surprised that he said nothing for a moment or two, but only held her closer.

"Don't, Nicholas!" she protested. "Please don't think I'm a heroine, or anything! The shore wasn't very far away!"

He murmured: "I suppose I ought to thank you for saving my miserable life—but you see, the trouble with me is, I'm not really worth saving . . . I bring nothing but trouble into the lives of those who love me. I am afraid, my dear, that you should have let me go—down into the briny!"

"Oh, no!" she protested with a cry that rose unbidden from her heart, "I couldn't!"

"Not even when I'd said good-bye to you, as it were, permanently?"

"No, not even then, Nicholas."

He said to her sadly, with a shake of his head: "I shall hurt you terribly, in all probability, before I'm through. I'm not worth all this devotion. I've ruined Edwina's life, and I suppose I'm going to wreck yours. At least, I hope not, but the chances are that I'll spoil it just as I ruined Edwina's——"

"And Gertrude's," put in Linda softly.

Nicholas broke away from her. His arms dropped to his sides like plummets. His face was withdrawn and frozen. "What do you know about Gertrude?" he asked coldly, in a voice she had never heard him use before.

She was frightened, but she looked back at him staunchly. "I know all about it," she said. "I met Gertrude in Bar Harbour."

"Good God!" he exclaimed under his breath to himself. "Is that where she is!"

"Yes." said Linda with a faint dryness. "Bar Harbour was full of Gertrude. Everywhere I went she was a topic of conversation. It was very stimulating, I assure you—especially after I'd found out she was your wife—to hear every one talking about her, and then meet her myself. It was quite an experience . . ."

The throbbing bitterness in her voice was not lost upon him. "I should have told you about Gertrude myself," he said quietly. "I see that now. I had no idea that she was in Bar Harbour," adding to himself, "but I might have known my sin would find me out."

He reached out and took Linda's hand in his own. "I feel like a cad, now. It must have been an awful shock for you to find out about me in that way. I'm a very bad man, really, but I've told you that. It's almost comic, really," he added, half to himself. "How unfortunately small the world is!"

"I'm glad," she retorted with scorn, "that you think it's funny—I can assure you *I* didn't. I was having dinner on the yacht when I found out——"

"Whose yacht?" exclaimed Nicholas suspiciously. "Not Gertrude's, I hope! Good God!"

"Oh, no! Don't get so agitated! The yacht belongs to a tycoon of industry named 'Walter dear.' As I was saying, half-way through dinner——"

Nicholas interrupted her again. "And who, may I ask, is 'Walter dear'?"

Linda paused and looked down at him with an odd ex-

pression. She answered slowly: "Perhaps I oughtn't to tell you. It's Gertrude's secret."

"Her lover?"—hopefully but sceptically.

"Oh, no, nothing like that. It's all terribly respectable, and Gertrude never lets you forget it for a minute. She was putting on a beautiful act. She was perfect as the wronged wife, and she managed to get lots of sympathy. She didn't have a good word to say for you. She was subtle about it, of course, but she made plenty of cracks during the course of the evening about you and Edwina—Edwina especially. There's no love lost there, is there? 'Walter dear,' however, escaped her shafts of humour. She's afraid of losing him. I suppose, having lost one man, you get that way. She's always harping on the fact that 'Walter dear' is going to marry her just as soon as 'that wretched Nicholas' will consent to a divorce."

"Consent!" echoed Nicholas, laughing.

He stared at Linda, with his mind in a turmoil of alternate hope and incredulity. Then he became conscious of Linda's expression. She looked oddly mature as she sat there upon the rock gazing down upon him. Her mouth was parted in a smile of understanding, tinged with irony; and her eyes, usually so guileless in their frank adoration of him, had lost their childishness. She looked at him as a woman of his own age would have looked at him. She was no longer the impetuous child who had fallen in love with him, but the woman he had created out of his own love, the result of his stupidity and his thoughtless desire. He was responsible for the maturity in her eyes, and the irony of her smile, and he owed her—if not the whole truth about his feelings for her—at least an appeal for forgiveness.

"Linda!" he began, taking both her hands; but she cut him off.

"Don't touch me," she said quickly. "What I heard in Bar Harbour has put a new light on everything between us."

"I don't see what you mean."

"No, you wouldn't."

She swung herself off the rock and faced him, and with a gesture of scorn she said: "I suppose you thought I didn't love you enough to stand the truth! Either that, or you didn't love me enough to take me into your confidence! I showed you the secret places of my heart—I called you my 'heart's darling,' as I remember—but I had to learn the secrets of *your* heart from Gertrude, in front of 'Walter dear' and a dozen other people who didn't know what was the matter with me. Oh, it's all right, I didn't give myself away. I just pretended that I'd had too much champagne, and went home. It was a shock to find out how little I meant to you."

Nicholas cleared his throat. "The trouble is," he said, "you mean too much. I realize that, now. And in the future I must do everything I can not to hurt you . . . I'm going to leave you now," he murmured under his breath. He began throwing brushes and tubes of oil paint into a wooden box at his feet. Then he unscrewed the canvas from his easel.

Linda stopped him with a cry. "Oh, don't do that, Nicholas! You've got to keep on painting!"

"There are other things I have to do which are more important," he said roughly.

"But it's the best picture you've done all summer! You're going to send it to the Academy!"

Her voice sounded distraught. Nicholas turned and took her face between his hands. He looked at her deeply, and said: "Oh, my poor dear! What have I done? You mustn't love me quite this much."

Then he disappeared upward among the boulders, and a moment later she heard his footsteps going off among the pines. He had not asked her to go with him. She sat down upon the rock she had vacated a moment since, and gazed meditatively out to sea; and gradually she became conscious of a large yacht propelled by Diesel engines bearing down upon the island from the north.

CHAPTER XXVII

HARRIET, who was alone on Fiddler's Beach, saw it too. When the yacht came abreast of the island it seemed to hover and change its mind. She put down the magazine she was reading and watched the convolutions of the long white boat with mounting curiosity. She asked herself whether by some freak of chance her errant lover Winsloe had taken it into his head to call upon the island, because he was the only one who anchored off Fiddler's Beach. But she discarded that idea almost immediately because Winsloe always painted his hulls black, and this boat was a staring white. Her pulse slowed down to normal.

The yacht anchored a few hundred yards off shore, near enough for Harriet to see what was going on upon the decks. A man in a white yachting cap—presumably the owner—came to the rail and stared at the island through a pair of binoculars, apparently with interest. A dinghy was being lowered, and Harriet fully expected the man, whoever he was, to get into it. But instead of that a woman in a white dress came fluttering out of the forward cabin, waved good-bye to him, and embarked in the dinghy alone, rowed by a member of the crew.

"Now what?" thought Harriet. "What the devil?"

There was an aura of expense and sophistication and sea-going glamour surrounding the yacht in front of her which piqued her curiosity intensely. None of the islanders, she felt sure, knew any one who was really rich enough to own that expensive bauble; unless (hopefully) Linda had acquired some new, fantastically wealthy suitor in Bar Harbour, which was hardly probable at the moment.

The dinghy was almost upon her now. She rose awkwardly from her seat under the alder bushes and waited for it. The prow of the little varnished boat met the stony beach with a grating sound, and coincident with it came the sound of a voice.

"Oh! oh, how do you do? I hope you don't mind my landing this way!"

The voice was not only English, but nervous. There was also a touch of irritability latent in it. Harriet was so surprised that she forgot her manners and said nothing. The woman gave her a birdlike smile as she stepped out of the dinghy and remarked:

"Awfully informal of me to arrive this way, isn't it? No wonder you're surprised. I hope you don't think I'm trespassing. I'm not, really . . . just calling, as it were."

She looked around her at the deserted beach with quick, darting eyes, while the sailor who had rowed her ashore pulled the dinghy up out of the tide. Harriet by this time had found her voice.

"Not at all! Not at all!" she said dryly. "We're used to almost anything here. But why didn't you anchor on the other side of the island where there is a dock? This was an uncomfortable landing."

"Oh, I had really no intention of landing here at all, until the Captain said: 'That's Camel Island,' and I thought I'd better stop. Walter dear agreed with me that it was time I did something myself—I don't trust that woman, you know. But of course you *don't* know."

The Englishwoman looked at Harriet meditatively for a moment, and then said: "I don't suppose you've got any idea of what's going on. I can see from looking at you that this is a nice, respectable place. Nothing fancy like Bar Harbour. I think she had her nerve coming here. Tony—he's Second Secretary of the Embassy in Washington, you know—Tony tells me that it was all her idea, not his, and I shouldn't wonder. She's like that, you know—she's ruthless. Never thinks about anybody but herself. I don't suppose she thought of you people for a moment when she came here, whether you'd mind the scandal or not."

Harriet grew white. "What do you mean by 'the scandal'?" she asked in a strangulated voice, thinking of course that news of their own private scandal of

Nicholas and Linda had reached Bar Harbour by some unfortunate channel, and that everybody was talking. "What scandal?"

"I can see," replied the Englishwoman, "that you're not on to it yet. They're rather clever about keeping people in the dark. But it doesn't last—they always get found out in the end, and then they have to move on. It must be a terrible life. I know I couldn't stand it. But then, I'm not like her—I've got more sense. I was brought up respectably. She was always wild and headstrong. I think she had the idea that if you belong to the Upper Ten you can get away with anything—those people are a law unto themselves in England, you know. Or maybe you do know; you look as though you'd travelled."

Harriet, however, was too confused to know anything very much. Her head was reeling. She looked at the Englishwoman as through a glass darkly and said: "I'm a little confused. I don't quite understand what you're talking about, or what scandal."

"I'm talking about Edwina," replied the other woman shortly.

"Mrs. Chadbourne!"

The Englishwoman's bright red lips curled into a smile. "Well, I suppose *you* call her that . . ." And gazing down at her white doeskin gloves with a lingering smile of satisfaction she added: "I am 'Mrs. Chadbourne,' really, you know. She's not married to him."

Harriet was stunned into complete silence. And bitterness flooded her soul. She was not only disillusioned, but horrified with Edwina—not because she had run away with Nicholas, but for the reason that she had betrayed them all by living in sin among them, without at least confiding in somebody, presumably herself. And Nicholas!

Nicholas was reprehensible. She had been angry with him before for allowing Linda to fall in love with him, but she was doubly enraged and disgusted with him now. He was bad—*bad*—all through.

Gertrude was looking at her with an expression of

hidden triumph. Harriet said to her with a cry of indignation: "You mean, I suppose, that Nicholas ran away with Edwina without marrying her!"

"Well, if you put it that way . . . *I'd* say, rather, that she ran away with him."

"No! no! He's like that. I can see it now. He's bad—thoroughly bad."

Gertrude became resentful at that. "No, he's not," she objected, "not really. He's a good sort—but he's weak. Weak as water. He was like putty in her hands. She told him he was going to be a great artist and he fell for it—he's so gullible. He'd fall for any of that sort of tripe. But he's not *bad*."

"He seduced her," affirmed Harriet, unconvinced.

Gertrude was moved to anger. "How do you know?" she parried tartly. Having put the blame on Edwina ten years ago she wanted to keep it there, chiefly because she hated Edwina so.

"Ah, but I *do* know," replied Harriet darkly. "Nothing you say will convince me that he's not that sort, because . . ."

"Because why?"

"That, Mrs. Chadbourne," murmured Harriet, "I cannot tell you. But you can rest assured——"

Gertrude broke in upon her. "You can call me 'Mrs. Chadbourne' if you like. But I'm not that, really. Actually I'm a Viscountess. Nicholas gave up one of the oldest titles in England when he ran away with Edwina. He calls himself 'Chadbourne,' but that was really his mother's maiden name. Edwina's got a title, too—her father was a grandson of a duke . . . I'll be giving up my title when I marry, of course—but my case is different. I'm giving up my title for a decent reason. And besides, it didn't belong to me in the first place. I mean by that, I wasn't born to it. I can tell you, if I'd been born into the peerage I wouldn't have thrown it away like that—over the windmill!"

"No, of course not," agreed Harriet absently.

Gertrude, now launched upon her favourite subject, could not help adding her opinion of the whole scandal. "I think it was crazy, myself. It was so *impractical*! They could have had a little affair, and I wouldn't have minded if they'd been discreet about it, because I'm very broadminded about these things. But to run away like that, when they didn't have to! Both of them," she added, "are romantic fools. That's why they ran away. That's the whole trouble with them, Nicholas especially."

Harriet agreed with her on that point; and she became green with apprehension and foreboding . . . Any man who did that sort of thing once was liable to do it again. And she was compelled to admit that Nicholas was a romantic figure; that, she remembered now, had been her first impression of him. She could see now, from what this woman was telling her, that Nicholas was a romanticist. He wouldn't stop at one woman . . . "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose . . .*" murmured Harriet, lapsing into French because it expressed, so perfectly, Nicholas's romantic iniquity.

"What's that you're saying?" asked Gertrude.

Harriet answered obliquely that her French was unintelligible to everybody. There was a question she wanted to ask Gertrude: "You said something just now about getting married—but you're not divorced, are you?"

Gertrude replied that she wasn't, but hoped to be almost immediately.

Harriet thought a moment, and then she observed slowly that she doubted very much if Nicholas wanted a divorce. "I think he fancies himself in the rôle of Tristan," she said; adding: "As a matter of fact, I think he's more like Chopin, really . . . But at any rate, living in sin may be difficult, but it's less binding to a man like Nicholas, and more romantic. He's used to it now, and it suits him. I wouldn't get my hopes up."

These comments irritated Gertrude, who said tartly that there wasn't very much he could do about it now. "I was the one who wouldn't allow the divorce," she in-

formed Harriet stiffly. "I could have gotten it any time I wanted by mentioning her as a co-respondent. But I had my reasons for keeping quiet. I was comfortable where I was, and I didn't want to move out and lose my home . . . Prince Setton was nice, of course, but I've got something much better now . . ."

"Prince Setton?"

"Nicholas's place in England," explained Gertrude, adding, "it's famous. It's open to the public on Tuesdays, at a shilling a head. Awful nuisance, but we have to do it . . . Edwina will have Prince Setton, now."

Regret, though faint, was discernible in Gertrude's voice, although she maintained as an afterthought that Walter's house had better plumbing. Harriet gathered from her tone that Edwina—if she got Prince Setton as a residence—would be getting something impressive. Harriett looked at Gertrude thoughtfully, and her mind began to gyrate once more. "Look here!" she said, "does Nicholas know yet that you want a divorce?"

"That's what I can't make out," Gertrude replied promptly, with irritation. "Edwina was supposed to tell him as soon as he got over concussion, or whatever it was. I haven't heard a word from him yet, and I thought I'd better stop off and see what was the matter. Edwina surprised me by not wanting the divorce especially. She really——"

"I shouldn't think she'd want him now," remarked Harriet grimly, meaning two things but veiling one of them. As Gertrude looked both surprised and inquiring she added: "I wouldn't want Nicholas—I know that. Not after he'd seduced me like that and ruined my reputation. I don't see, really, how *any* woman would want Nicholas, if she knew that truth about him."

Gertrude cocked her head on one side. "Are there any other women?" she inquired suspiciously.

"No," said Harriet flatly and quickly, "not here, at any rate. But I think," she added, pinioning Gertrude

with a steely eye, "you'd do us a favour if you'd get him out of here as quickly as possible."

Gertrude thought she saw what Harriet meant, and said that Nicholas had been a romantic figure always. "He's frightfully attractive to women," she sighed. "I suppose he can't help it, really . . . I'm sorry for Edwina, because I've an idea that she's put up with a lot."

Harriet added: "That's the path to Juniper Cottage, over there along the sea. It's not very far. Keep straight on and you can't get lost."

"Thanks awfully . . ." murmured Gertrude. She hesitated, reluctant to part from this woman so quickly, for they seemed to have much in common. She couldn't put her finger on it, exactly, but there it was . . . "Good-bye!" she exclaimed. "So nice to have met you! Will I be seeing you on Long Island, do you think? Do you ever come down that way at all? You must come and meet Walter—I'm sure he'd like you."

Harriet asked for Walter's name, and got it. She was impressed, because every one had heard of Walter. "I hope you'll be happy," she added awkwardly, "I think you deserve it!"

"Yes," said Gertrude, "I do."

She wavered off into the woods, and Harriet watched her go with varied emotions. During the past fifteen minutes she had been so enthralled with Gertrude that she had forgotten her original shock, but as the other woman's white-clad figure disappeared along the path to Juniper Cottage, it returned in force. With a muttered exclamation she stalked away in the opposite direction, up the hill.

Her face was livid with indignation. Nicholas and Edwina—especially Nicholas—had brought ill-repute and shame upon them all. It was undoubtedly common knowledge along the coast, from Campobello to Monhegan, by now, that Camel Island had been harbouring a couple who were living in sin. And the worst of it was that this was no ordinary runaway couple, but a peer of the realm

and the great-granddaughter of a duke—a couple who were very much in the public eye. The scandal would give the island a bad name, and end by hurting them all . . .

Harriet could swear when she chose, and she chose now to call Nicholas every name in her fairly extensive vocabulary—some of them not only vituperative but indecent.

She could forgive him perhaps, for letting Linda fall in love with him—that, after all, was the sort of thing men do—but she could not forgive him for what he had done to Camel Island, which, in fifty years of peace and respectability, had never had a scandal before.

Her father was playing backgammon with Clarice Gayly on the side porch of the Big House. Both of them were intent upon the game, which had been doubled. Her father's face was bland and calm, and utterly unconscious for the bombshell hovering over them all. Her heart ached for him. Clarice, however, affected her quite differently. The sight of her, joyously playing backgammon for two cents a game while disaster threatened them all, was more than she could bear. A cry of disgust broke from her, and Clarice looked up in surprise. "Oh, hallo there!" Clarice said.

Then Clarice noticed her Cousin Harriet's face, and she added: "Good Lord! What's the matter now?"

"Plenty!" returned Harriet grimly, mounting the steps, "*and it's all your fault!*"

"What do you mean?" demanded Clarice angrily.

Mr. Heseltine shook the dice again with a murmur of dissension, but Harriet ignored his protests and went right on accusing Clarice of the whole disaster. "I knew—I knew from the beginning—when you rented that house to strangers—that we were in for trouble!" She looked at the two of them with dilated nostrils like the horse in the Book of Job, smelling the battle from afar, and added, with grim triumph—"and we've got it now!"

Clarice expected Mr. Heseltine to tell Harriet to calm down and talk more coherently; but instead of that he

pushed away the backgammon board and drummed his fingers thoughtfully on the table in front of him with a pensive frown. She wondered why he was not more anxious to find out what was the matter; and so did Harriet. Both women looked at him in surprise, and Harriet opened her mouth to say something, but the old man intervened. With a wave of his hand he said:

"I can see that you've found out! . . . It was bound to happen like this sooner or later, I suppose—but I was hoping that Edwina would get away from the island before she was thrown to the lions—before she was torn to shreds by you women."

His voice sounded extraordinarily bitter. Clarice looked at him in amazement and asked him what in the world he meant. He answered her with a rueful smile; and, still cryptic, remarked that his hope had been futile. "I suppose she gave herself away," he sighed.

"Oh, no, she didn't," replied Harriet with scorn. "Not her! I learned it from somebody else."

"From Nicholas, I presume, then?"

"No," said Harriet, dropping her bombshell, "from his wife!"

Mr. Heseltine was so surprised that he said nothing for a moment, but Clarice uttered a cry: "His wife! What do you mean, Harriet? What *are* you talking about?"

"I mean simply that he's not married to Edwina—never was."

"Oh, horrors!" cried Clarice automatically; but there was less horror than excitement in her voice.

Harriet was looking at her father, who was wearing an irritating half-smile, and still drumming his hands upon the table in front of him. Finally she gave a stifled exclamation:

"You knew! You knew, all the time!"

"Yes," he replied evenly, with majestic calm, "I knew. As a matter of fact I've known for weeks . . . long before Edwina confessed her sins to me . . . that she and Nicholas weren't married. I cannot understand," he

added with sarcasm, "why you did not find it out before this, you're so observant about people, without being told. When you say 'his wife'—do you mean 'Gertrude' by any chance?"

"I suppose that's her name," replied Harriet, adding, "she's the Viscountess something-or-other. That makes Nicholas a Viscount, a peer of the realm. So you see, we've been harbouring a nice, tidy little scandal of High Life. I'm sure it will be only a question of time before the whole thing is written up in the gossip columns—I hope they leave us out of it. Gertrude," she concluded grimly, "is about to marry a tycoon of industry. That makes the whole scandal even more interesting to the general public."

"How can Gertrude marry anybody, if, as you say, she's still married to Nicholas?" Mr. Heseltine wanted to know.

Harriet delivered herself of another weighty piece of information. "Gertrude—or whatever her name is—came to the island this afternoon for the express purpose of asking Nicholas to give her a divorce, so that she can marry her tycoon."

Clarice broke in at this point, saying: "I don't see why she has to ask him for a divorce—why can't she get it on the usual grounds? They've been living in sin here all summer!"

Mr. Heseltine was rather hazy on that point himself. But then, he knew very little about the British divorce laws. There must be some good reason for Gertrude's sudden descent upon the island. Harriet, however, had no explanation for it.

Clarice was fascinated, rather than worried or shocked, to hear the truth about her tenants. "I always thought," she observed during the silence which followed, "that Nicholas was a romantic figure, ever since the first day I saw him, standing there in the ferry with his hat off, and that grey hair around the temples! And to think! I've been harbouring a British peer! Isn't it fascinating?"

"You've been harbouring more than a titled foreigner," Harriet told her scathingly. "That man is *bad!* He's bad all through. I hope we get rid of him soon before he . . . does anything awful!"

Mr. Heseltine stopped drumming the table, and sighed profoundly. "Don't go on that way, Harriet! Nothing's going to happen—I'll see to that."

Harriet gave him a deep look; ignoring Clarice, who was, by now, completely baffled by the way they were throwing innuendos at each other. Harriet said to her father slowly and meaningly, each word dropping from her lips like ominous wisdom from the Delphic Sibyl:

"Yes. But if he's free to marry? What are you going to do then?"

"I don't know," answered Mr. Heseltine with perfect truth. "I hadn't thought of it. Up to now I've been thinking of Edwina."

CHAPTER XXVIII

NICHOLAS, however, was unconscious of the large white yacht anchored off Fiddler's Beach. His progress along the island was hasty and abstracted, and although the sea was visible most of the way he was too preoccupied to notice what was happening upon it. He strode along the rough road paying scant attention to the world around him, with his mind in a pothor. He had always known that this moment would come, but now that it was upon him he was more confused than relieved, and his expression was not only abstracted but charged with bewilderment. No one looking at him would have known what he thought, because he did not know himself. As he walked homeward the enchantment of Singing Beach—the golden, subtle spell which had been around him all afternoon, even before Linda came—seemed to follow him through the woods like the ghost of some heartrending

melody, the bouquet of some heady, forbidden wine . . .
“The Apple tree, the singing, and the gold . . .”

“Those,” he told himself bitterly as he found himself lapsing into poetry, “are the benefits of a classical education. My mind, naturally, slips to *Hippolytus* when I should be thinking of what I am going to tell Edwina. . . . Must I tell her, among other things, how I am being haunted by the enchantments of a beach? Or would it be wiser not to say anything at all about the ‘singing, and the gold’?”

In all probability she knew already, without his telling her anything. Womanly intuition would have told her something, if not everything, before now.

Little beads of sweat came out on his upper lip as he neared Juniper Cottage, and his expression changed visibly to one of inward strain burdened with sorrow. It seemed, after all these years, not only sad, but stupid, that this long awaited moment should come upon them now, in such a way. How many times in the past he had visualized the moment of his release, and with what relief; but now, his heart was troubled and sore within him. He mounted the steps of Juniper Cottage heavily and pushed open the door.

Edwina was sitting before the fire playing with the cat. She had an empty spool tied with a piece of string, and she was waving it slowly to and fro before the fascinated gaze of the kitten, who raised an occasional paw to slap at the spool as it went by. Edwina’s face was amused and tender . . . she was capable of infinite tenderness and maternal love . . . but she had denied herself always so that he could live . . . and now, unless he did the right thing, he would destroy her utterly.

He let the door close behind him, and Edwina looked up. “Oh, hallo, dear!” she said, rising. She smiled at him; and then the smile faded. “Nicholas!” she murmured uneasily. “What’s the matter?”

“The matter?” he echoed absently, dropping his painting materials in a corner and wandering into the

centre of the room. "Nothing's the matter . . . only . . . in fact, I've rather surprising news for you."

"So I suppose, from your expression!"

"Very surprising news indeed. . . ."

Edwina said nothing. She held the kitten against her cheek and Nicholas could hear it purring with contentment in the silence that followed. Edwina kept her eyes on the fire—she would not look at him. Gradually he became conscious of the fact that she was telling him, by her silence, that she knew already what he had come to reveal to her, that somehow she had known before he did; and the knowledge that she had kept it from him made his heart stagger with astonishment and dismay.

"Edwina!" he exclaimed, looking at her in bewilderment, "you know, then? I don't need to tell you, do I?"

"No," she said, "you don't. I've known for about four days, now. I lied to you that day I went to Rockland. I was going to meet Gertrude—not to buy a leg of lamb. She told me everything, then. It was you she wanted to see, not me. She sent you a letter, which I opened."

Nicholas interrupted her with an exclamation. "But why didn't you tell me any of this? Why was I kept in the dark so long?"

Edwina gave a shrug. "Because you had concussion, naturally! The doctor said you were too ill to be worried. So I took it upon myself to go and find out what Gertrude wanted—her letter sounded very agitated, and I thought something was up."

"Yes," said Nicholas, frowning, "but I still cannot understand why you did not tell me this morning, when it was obvious that I had recovered from my concussion. Why, if I was well enough to paint, wasn't I well enough to hear the glad news that Gertrude at last wanted a divorce?"

Edwina reddened, and then turned pale. A shiver passed over her, and she moved unconsciously nearer to the warmth of the fire. Her expression not only puzzled

him but frightened him, because it was so withdrawn and so unhappy.

"What is it, my dear?" he asked her gently. "Why have you lied to me?"

He was astonished to see her eyes well with tears.

"It was a terrible thing for me to do," she said, as a tear slipped down her cheeks. "It was *cheap*! Forgive me! I've never done a thing like that before. I've always prided myself on my breeding—I thought I was '*fine*,' as my French governess used to say of Mother—but I'm not. I'm *cheap* and common, like any little tart who wants to hold her man. That's what I am," she added bitterly, "a tart! I see it now. It's what I've been all along. I fancied myself as Iseult when I ran away with you—I excused my conduct on the grounds that a *grande passion* excuses everything, but it doesn't. And now I've lied to you, because I'm fundamentally *cheap* and bad."

"That still doesn't explain why you lied to me," Nicholas told her. "I can't see what reason you had for keeping it from me."

"Can't you?" murmured Edwina. She set the kitten gently down upon the hearthrug so that she could stem the flow of her tears. Then she looked at Nicholas steadily, and said: "You're very stupid. Either that, or you're lying to me. You know why I was trying to hold you. I thought that if I got you away from the island before you knew that you were free, you'd forget Linda and marry me. I knew you'd hesitate before you had an affair with Linda. She's so much younger that you'd want to protect her innocence. Also, the bloom is off the peach, now. You know how sordid a *grande passion* can be, after ten years."

"Do you?" he parried. "Is that the way you feel about our situation?"

"No," she replied, "that's the trouble! . . . My love for you is still a lovely, golden thing. It hasn't changed

much—you still enchant me. Otherwise, do you think I'd care whether you married Linda or not?"

"But, Edwina—" he protested. She cut him off with a gesture and went on.

"Perhaps you think I want to marry you because I'd like to be respectable again. But that's not it. . . . Everything I've done in life, since I was ten years old, I've done because of you. You didn't know that, did you. You came to Elvers once when you were home on leave from France and took me fishing on the river. After that, my life had a purpose. I made myself into what I thought you'd want me to be."

"You did a good job!" exclaimed Nicholas in astonishment. He added in disgust: "I began to seduce you, I suppose, at the age of ten. Do you think that Patsy, by any chance, has designs on me?"

"Probably," replied Edwina, grinning. "You must realize that you are fatally attractive to women."

He did not like the way she was smiling at him, and he said crossly: "It's not my fault that I appeal to Linda and Patsy—and yourself. I was not consciously seducing any of you. You seem to think I'm a professional romantic!"

"No, my dear, not that!" she answered, but he went on bitterly.

"Professional romantic—so that's what I am! I've always wondered. Linda, I think, knows that my feet are made of clay. Just now, on Singing Beach, she inferred as much."

"Did she?" murmured Edwina. "In my particular case it doesn't matter much what you are, because mine is the sort of love that 'looks on tempests.' In some ways you *are* a romantic, Nicholas, but you're not, thank God, a professional one. At least, I've never seen any evidences of it. . . . Perhaps," she added softly, "that's why you are so dangerous to a young girl's peace of mind. You give the impression of being desperately sincere."

"Give the impression——!" he broke in, but Edwina soothed his indignation by changing the subject.

"So it was Linda, I gather, who told you the news about Gertrude? I suppose she saw her in Bar Harbour—I was afraid of that."

"Linda was terribly upset."

"Naturally. It takes a thick skin to withstand the slings and arrows of polite society, especially scandal about someone you love. And she does love you, Nicholas, terribly. I don't think you know how much she loves you, but I do. I can remember so well how it felt to be young, and to be in love with you. . . . The whole world was changed as a result, and it was bright and full of sunshine and my heart used to sing all day."

"The Apple tree, the singing, and the gold" repeated Nicholas under his breath.

"Answer me, Nicholas," Edwina said, facing him across the small room. "Are you in love with *her*?"

Nicholas, however, did not hear the question. From where he was standing he could see out of the window that faced the garden and the sea. A woman in a white dress was standing among the flowers, looking indecisively at the house with her head tipped on one side. Her hair was a rich, English blond, and her eyes were intensely blue. She was wearing white doeskin gloves, and that final touch made her look ridiculously out of place on Camel Island. She brought the outer world with her. Nicholas realized that his sanctuary was ended. The world had caught up with him now.

Edwina repeated the question, but he interrupted her with a wave of his hand. "Edwina," he said, "there's Gertrude out there, now. Will you go and ask her in?"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE tide was low, and the lobster cars were lying at the bottom of the pier. The stench of seaweed and barnacles filled the afternoon air, temporarily drowning the subtle fragrance of the pines. Linda took a long-handled net out of the boathouse, and walked gingerly down the steep gangplank to the lobster cars. They had been filled the night before, and the water in them was dark with roving crustaceans. Linda stood beside the open trough filled with sea-water and floating lobsters, and watched the play of sunlight on the speckled, dark green and crimson bodies. Then she plunged the net into the water and brought it up again with a lobster tangled in it. She shook the net, and the lobster clattered out on the wooden floor of the car. "Keepers," she muttered to herself, "he'll weigh all of two pounds." Her eyes pierced the water again, and she waited until a lobster of the required size roved into sight, then plunged. Some of the lobsters were too small, and she tossed them back again. Having exhausted one trough, she moved on to another one, where she repeated the process until she had over twenty pounds of lobsters. By this time the shadows were deepening under the pier among the barnacle-encrusted piles, and the afternoon was merging into early evening. The picnic was scheduled for six-thirty, and as she wheeled the lobsters across the island her heart began to throb with suspense. "In half an hour I'll know," she murmured. "Either I'll see Nicholas to-night, or I won't."

So far, she had managed things superbly. No one had the slightest idea that this lobster picnic was her idea. But by a process of suggestion and intrigue—aided and abetted by the fact that the corn was ripe—she had put the idea into every one's head that it would be nice to have an evening picnic on Fiddler's Beach, and ask Nicholas and Edwina. It was a diplomatic move so subtle that not even her Aunt Harriet suspected her of having

engineered it—Harriet blamed Mr. Heseltine. Harriet disliked picnics on general principles, and she disapproved of this one intensely. “I don’t think,” she maintained, “that it’s a good idea to have a picnic now.”

“You keep on saying that,” replied Mr. Heseltine, “but you don’t say why—what has ‘now’ got to do with it?”

Harriet refused to divulge what she meant; so Mr. Heseltine said to Linda: “Go on down the hill, lovey, and get the lobsters. The men have gone to Port Hard to buy a horse. Harriet can pick the corn!”

Linda trundled the lobsters out upon Fiddler’s Beach, and let go of the heavy wheelbarrow with a murmur of relief. Fiddler’s Beach, as yet, was lonely and unpopulated. She lay down upon it and drowsily watched a gannet dive and swim along the evening ripples. The lobsters crawled beside her in the wheelbarrow with funny little clacking sounds. A thrush was singing in the woods, a sound like water dripping over stones, and the sea whispered an accompaniment along the wide beach. Linda relaxed and let the evening flow with her. The sound of the thrush singing as though nothing very important was about to happen soothed her jangled nerves. The moment was exquisite, because it was the quiet prelude to an evening of intense pleasure, or intense pain. Either she was about to see Nicholas, or she wasn’t. He had said to her vaguely that morning when she met him on the road: “I’ll be there—maybe. You know I don’t like those large picnics on Fiddler’s Beach.”

“It’s not a large picnic,” she had said feebly. “Just the family and you and Edwina—and possibly Mrs. Channing. Grandpa wanted to give a picnic because the corn was ripe.”

Liar, liar—she wanted to give a picnic, because it was the only way she could see him without deliberately running after him. Ever since Gertrude had descended upon the island like a parachutist, Nicholas had avoided everybody, and she could stand no more.

Nicholas had looked at her once, quizzically, and then

he strode off in the direction of Singing Beach, without asking her to accompany him although she was laden with sketching materials.

Linda stirred uneasily upon the sand, and turned her head a little so that she could watch the path leading to Juniper Cottage. While she lay there, supine, people began to emerge from the woods. First came her mother, carrying newspapers and a little bundle of kindling, followed by her aunt Harriet, who was laden with green corn and a large pot in which to boil the lobsters. The two women wandered up and down the beach collecting driftwood for the fire, and after a while they were joined by Julie Channing, whose contribution to the picnic was two pounds of butter. When Mr. Heseltine arrived he was carrying a bottle of rye. Harriet looked at him with a martyred expression, and said nothing. Linda listened intently for more footsteps above the sound of the wind in the bayberry bushes. There was a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach, and her heart was thumping uneasily in her chest. She was now afraid that Nicholas was never going to materialize. Little Eva, Julie Channing's dog, came bounding down the beach, and poked his cold, wet muzzle into her face. She put her arm around the dog and lay there, staring into the sky, which was beginning to take on the colour of evening. Her grandfather was walking sedately up and down the beach, and she wondered nervously if he had any suspicion of the tumult in her breast. He looked at her once, inquiringly, and then passed on. Then she heard footsteps coming along the beach from Juniper Cottage. She gripped Little Eva's soft flanks, and the dog gave a short yelp of pain. Cautiously, she turned her head and looked straight down the beach. Edwina was walking alone down the pale grey sand, carrying a wicker picnic basket. Nicholas was nowhere in sight.

Linda stared blankly at the pallid sky over her head. All that planning—that patient scheming—for nothing! The voices around the fire drifted across to her mockingly,

and the laughter that echoed over the beach had a hollow sound. The picnic was a dreadful travesty of what it should have been. Linda strained her ears, hoping that Edwina would reveal where Nicholas was at the moment, but she did not mention his name. She sat down beside the fire and began to husk corn; and Linda saw her grandfather move towards her cautiously and sit down upon a neighbouring rock. Edwina said to him, her clear English accents rising above the splash of the water: “ You should have a folding chair to sit upon! That rock must be very uncomfortable! ”

Linda was amazed at Edwina’s calm. She seemed perfectly at ease with all of them, not at all subdued and crestfallen now that the truth was out. Her assurance irritated Linda considerably. Why should Edwina—just because she was Edwina—get away with it, and not suffer? What was it about Edwina that made people—men especially—like her and respect her in spite of her moral shortcomings? “ Oh, God! ” thought Linda miserably, sitting up, “ what has she got that I haven’t? I couldn’t get away with it—Grandpa would give me hell if I tried anything like that. And obviously Nicholas doesn’t love me, or he’d be here now.”

Her grandfather noticed that she was sitting up, and said to her across the intervening beach: “ Now that you’re rested, perhaps you’d like to boil the lobsters.”

There was nothing she disliked more than dropping live lobsters into a pot of boiling water. He knew that, and their eyes met grimly. She saw that he was angry with her for not joining the others around the fire. He suspected something of the tempest that was going on within her, and was not entirely in sympathy with it. She rose, and wheeled the lobsters down to the fire without answering him. “ Go on! ” said her grandfather. “ I’m hungry.”

Linda went about it slowly. Edwina noticed the pallor of her face, and, thinking that it was due to squeamishness, said: “ Let Nicholas boil the lobsters for you, Linda—here he comes, now.”

Overcome with surprise and relief, Linda dropped the lobster she was holding into the water with a loud splash. "That's better," said her grandfather dryly. Nicholas came up behind her and stared into the pot with interest. "Chinese vermillion," he murmured appreciatively. "How quickly the beasts change colour, and what a lovely colour it is!"

"Why don't you paint one to-morrow?" suggested Linda derisively under her breath. "Maybe you'll have better luck with lobsters than you did with winkles."

He wandered away from her without answering, and Linda felt rebuked. He sat down beside her mother, and she heard him say: "I've finished my picture of Singing Beach. It's not half bad, really."

"That's understatement," said Edwina. "It's excellent. I think it's the best thing he's ever done. He's been working terribly hard on it this week—that's why you haven't seen more of him."

That was not, Linda felt, the reason why she had not seen Nicholas. She dropped another lobster into the pot with a gesture of bewilderment—Nicholas had given her a bad week—and looked at him through the firelight with a challenging stare. Her grandfather's voice interrupted her reverie. "Stop staring into space, Linda, and put in more lobsters." His tone was abrupt and cross. She looked at him a little defiantly, and thought she saw his head move slightly from side to side, as if in warning.

Carelessly, she began dropping lobsters into the pot, and Nicholas caught sight of her with a cry of protest. "Look out, Linda! You'll scald yourself with that water if you don't watch out! Here, let me do it!" He sounded extremely annoyed with her, and she began to cry. He saw that her eyes were glimmering, and exclaimed in a low voice: "What the devil is the matter with you? Did you burn yourself?"

"No," she replied shortly, "I've got smoke in my eyes."

He accepted that explanation, although there was very

little smoke, and cooked the rest of the lobsters himself. Ten minutes later, when they were done, he turned to her to say something, and saw that her eyes were still glimmering. "Look here!" he said with a worried frown, "I've got to talk to you!"

"Yes, I know"—hopefully.

"Not here, though," he muttered.

"Later to-night, maybe, after the picnic . . ."

"No," said Nicholas, thinking that the starlight might have disastrous consequences. "To-morrow, perhaps."

Harriet, sitting between Mrs. Heseltine and Edwina, noticed the troubled frown on Nicholas's face, and the unconscious rapture on Linda's, and, putting two and two together, reached an alarming sum. It was madness to have an evening picnic just now. Like Nicholas, she distrusted the effects of the starlight.

"What are you thinking about now, Harriet?" said Mr. Heseltine with a chuckle. "Your face looks like a washboard—all frowns."

"I was thinking about the stars," she replied truthfully.

Nicholas helped himself to a lobster, and sat down beside Edwina. "In a little while," he said to Harriet, "the sky will be full of stars—let's see how many of them we can name—not many, I'll wager."

"All that I know of a certain star——'" quoted Linda unexpectedly, and then stopped, because every one seemed surprised.

"Why, Linda," exclaimed Harriet, "I didn't know you ever read poetry—I thought your mind was concentrated on art. Imagine you quoting Browning!"

"The two," replied Linda frostily, "sometimes go together."

"I don't like Browning much," announced Edwina during the pause that followed, "except parts of *The Ring and the Book*."

"You should like 'Porphyria's Lover,'" said Linda sweetly, rudely displaying an amazing knowledge of

Browning to Harriet's consternation; she knew the poem well, and was horrified at her impudence. But Edwina, fortunately, had never read "Porphyria's Lover," and she missed the implication.

Nicholas was both angry with Linda and amused. He was also a little upset, because he could see the pathos of Linda reading Browning, only because he liked it. Edwina's words came back to him with a shock: "I made myself into what I thought you'd want me to be."

He looked at Linda almost in horror, and she said to him coolly: "That game of yours, Nicholas, wouldn't be much fun, because Grandpa would win too easily. He knows practically every star there is—don't you, Grandpa?"

"My father taught me to read the stars when I was a boy—*he'd* learned them on clipper ships going around the Horn, on his way to China. . . . I have tried to teach some astronomy to Linda, but she doesn't seem interested," said Mr. Heseltine.

"I should have been a boy," retorted Linda bitingly, "and then I'd have been some comfort to you—I see that now."

"You'd have made a charming boy," put in Nicholas, "with your long legs and narrow hips, and that arrogant head of yours."

"So I'm arrogant, am I?" murmured Linda, stung.

Nicholas threw another log on the fire, and a shower of sparks rose into the dark sky. Mr. Heseltine, who had been cautiously watching Linda's expressions, now looked at the sparks, and observed to himself that man was born to trouble, and very annoying trouble at that. Then his eyes wandered to Edwina. He could not tell what she was thinking, and her serenity that evening puzzled him. It was not her moral condition that worried him, but her apparent unconcern about the future.

"Edwina," he began hesitantly, "what are your plans? When do you leave the island?"

Edwina murmured in a low voice: "I don't know

. . . our plans depend on Nicholas. He wants to stay here and paint a while longer, I think, but Gertrude . . . is in a hurry."

Mr. Heseltine did not continue the subject. Much, it seemed, depended upon Nicholas. Their lives were all tangled together, and Nicholas was holding the shears. Mr. Heseltine poured himself out another drink of rye.

"What was that about me?" said Nicholas from the other side of the fire, lifting an eyebrow. "Did I hear my name mentioned?"

"I said our plans depend on you," answered Edwina evenly.

"Our plans depend, also, on Mr. Hitler," said Nicholas, helping himself to another lobster. "Anything may happen. The news was very sour this morning. This time next year we may be spending the summer in bomb-proof shelters—I shall have to build one at Prince Setton, I suppose."

"That man!" said Harriet descriptively.

Linda was growing alarmingly pale. "Nicholas! . . ." she faltered, "you're too old to go to war, aren't you?"

"I'm not too old to be bombed," he replied thoughtlessly.

The conversation went on in the same vein; and Linda rose suddenly and moved out of the radius of the fire-light. Someone called to her to come back, but she walked on towards the edge of the sea. The sky overhead was gradually filling with stars, and she looked up at them bleakly. The war! That aspect of a dreary future, at least, had not occurred to her until now. Even if a miracle happened, the war would take Nicholas from her in the end. . . . She heard someone coming after her, and quickened her pace towards the dark line of trees that marked the end of the beach.

Nicholas caught up with her. "What's the matter now?" he exclaimed crossly, putting out his hand to stop her flight.

Linda mumbled something indistinct about the war.

His first impulse was to laugh, until he saw how upset she was, and then his face sobered. "Look here!" he said, "you mustn't take on that way! Stop crying! We've all got to die some time."

That inescapable fact was of no comfort to her. "It might have been better," she said ruefully, "if I had let you drown."

"I told you that at the time!" he replied, grinning.

She gave a cry of annoyance. "Oh, stop being so damn' flippant! I can't stand it—you take everything so callously!"

"Stop swearing at me! That's the only way I *can* take this beastly mess that's ahead of me. I don't like the idea of war any more than you do. Added to that, I'm the one who's going to die—not you."

"That's just it," she murmured, with a shudder.

This, obviously, was no laughing matter. Nicholas said to her: "Don't let's stand here in full view of everybody, if you're going to cry. Either pull yourself together and come back to the fire, or let's keep on walking until you calm down."

Linda had ceased to care very much what anybody thought; and it crossed her mind that Edwina must have been in the same frame of mind when she eloped with Nicholas. He added as they walked on the beach: "What the devil is the matter with you this evening, anyway? I've never seen any one so nervy!"

"Why wouldn't I be?" she muttered.

"What was that?"

Linda repeated in a louder voice: "I said—'why wouldn't I be upset?'"

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed as a wall of dark trees loomed ahead of them. "We've come to the end of the beach. Until you've recovered your poise, let's sit down upon this rock——"

"—and tell sad stories of the death of kings," supplied Linda, still thinking about Hitler.

Nicholas looked at her in amusement. "You've been

doing a lot of reading lately, haven't you? Even Shakespeare!"

This gave her the opportunity she had been waiting for all evening. Taking a deep breath, she said: "What else was there for me to do? You were too busy, or else too preoccupied, to go sketching with me. You haven't been near me for a week, and it's not much fun going sketching by myself." Her voice stopped, and she waited for him to make some comment.

"I see now," said Nicholas after a long pause, "that I shouldn't have left you alone all week. It was a mistake. I should have had the whole thing out with you the day after Gertrude left."

Linda said nothing. She was too frightened to speak, now that the moment for which she had angled with such finesse was upon her. Faint with terror and anxiety, she waited for Nicholas to go on. Finally, after another pause, he said: "Linda! I know what's in your mind to-night, but this is not the time or the place to discuss it. There are at least four people sitting over there on the beach who care deeply for us, and whose lives will be seriously affected if we do anything quickly or foolishly. Pull yourself together! This is my fault, I know—but don't go to pieces now."

Neither of them saw the dark figure moving inexorably towards them along the brink of the sea. Linda said brokenly: "I'd have been perfectly all right to-night, if you hadn't begun to talk about the war—that finished me!"

"But, Linda!" he protested, "why look so far ahead? It may never come. If you want trouble, the present moment is grim enough!"

"Grim?"

"That's what I said," he told her flatly. "I don't suppose for a moment that it has occurred to you that I might be upset myself this evening, or that the past week was not all beer and skittles for me, either? That was one reason why I didn't want to come to the picnic."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean simply that Gertrude's advent has put me in a quandary. I was never going to tell you about Gertrude, not because I was ashamed of the situation, but it made the whole business less complicated to have you think that I was actually married to Edwina. But now that you know I'm not——"

A voice out of the shadows interrupted him. "Well, Linda! How long are you going to keep Mr. Chadbourne sitting out here? We have been roasting the corn, and now, I am afraid, it's all cold and unappetizing. This was rather thoughtless of you."

Linda made no reply—she was shocked into silence. In the stress of the moment she had forgotten that her movements that evening might seem a little odd. Apparently her grandfather thought she was being indiscreet, and had come after her.

Nicholas got up off the rock. "It was my fault entirely, I'm afraid, Mr. Heseltine! I kept her out here."

That information seemed to reassure Mr. Heseltine, who moved off again into the shadows. As they trailed after him down the beach, Nicholas said to Linda in an undertone, "I knew this was a foolish move—I shouldn't have followed you, I suppose, but you seemed upset and I did it without thinking."

"No matter," said Linda, finding her voice, "the harm's done."

"Your grandfather," added Nicholas, "knows all, I'm afraid."

"Why, of course! You didn't think that anybody had left him in the dark, did you?" she answered bitterly.

His rejoinder was: "Hell! what a mess."

Harriet was throwing refuse into the fire, and when she saw them she tossed an empty lobster claw into the fire with an angry fillip. She exclaimed to Nicholas as he sat down: "The fire's about gone, now—you'll have to put some more wood on it if you want to roast an ear of corn. The fire has to be just right, or it's no good. I don't see,"

she added, turning to Linda, "why you couldn't wait until after supper to take a walk—now you've ruined Mr. Chadbourne's supper."

"I didn't ask him to go with me," retorted Linda calmly.

Harriet threw more shells into the fire with a loud rattle. She was furious at Linda, and she was also ill at ease. What, if anything, had transpired on that rock, out there in the dark? She tried to find the answer in Linda's expression, and failed. Either way, it boded no good for the island. Edwina was subdued and silent—had been ever since Nicholas followed Linda across the beach. Harriet's eyes darted to and fro through the shadows, from Edwina to Nicholas, but their faces were almost totally expressionless. Edwina's silence was the only thing which gave any indication of strain or confusion.

Not knowing what else to do, Harriet broke a silence which was becoming oppressive with the remark that there was sure to be war before spring.

Nicholas exclaimed quickly, with a gesture of impatience: "Don't let's talk about the war, for God's sake! Let's talk about something cheerful. This may be my last evening here," he added, causing an immediate sensation, "and I want to be happy."

"Your last evening!" echoed Harriet, with a cry of surprise in which Nicholas detected relief. "Oh!"

Nicholas went on nervously: "Yes—let's talk about something frivolous, so that our last evening will be pleasant together. Don't let's be too serious and complicated." His eyes sought Edwina's through the dark. She looked back at him wordlessly, and he could not tell whether she was relieved or disappointed, or just surprised. Her only reaction was a soft flicker of the eyelids. Then his eyes wandered reluctantly towards Linda. Her immobility frightened him. She was sitting there with her eyes fixed on the glowing coals, and her face was stony. He longed to say to her: "Don't you see that this is the only thing I *can* do, now? We've made such a mess of

the whole business—every one knows what's going on—the only decent thing I can do, now, is to leave before it's too late!" He tried to catch her eye, but she would not look at him. He saw her tremble once, and then subside again into a desperate, alarming stillness.

Mrs. Heseltine was the only one who actually voiced any dismay. "Oh," she cried in genuine accents of regret, "that's too bad, really! The summer isn't over yet, and fall is the loveliest time of the year on the island! Can't you change your mind? Don't go for another week!"

"Well, maybe," he muttered, not knowing what else to say. Their eyes met across the fire, and she smiled at him easily.

"Think it over," she said, and he thought he detected a faint gleam of understanding in her eye.

"Isn't this rather sudden?" asked Harriet.

"No," he replied coolly, "it isn't. I've had the idea in my head ever since I finished my picture this morning, but I said nothing about it because I didn't want to put a damper on the picnic—good-byes are such a bore, don't you think?"

Harriet did not reveal what she thought. She said with a sly look across the intervening fire: "I don't suppose we'll ever see you again—war or no war, you won't come back to us next summer. It's a pity, because your garden will go to seed again. That garden is fated! It will go back to nature, now, and the lupines and the blackberries will take possession of it again—all that work," she added sweetly, "for nothing!"

Edwina spoke, for the first time since Nicholas had followed Linda down the beach. "I don't look at it that way," she said clearly. "Whether I come back here or not, it was worth it, I assure you, to clean up that garden. At least, I'll leave something behind me."

At the sound of her voice Mr. Heseltine shifted restlessly upon his rock, and when she was through he said suddenly, to no one in particular: "I think I'll go up the hill.

It's getting rather chilly, and the tide is beginning to creep up on us. Good-night, Edwina! If you are really going to-morrow, I'll come and say good-bye to you in the morning." And without further palaver he rose, picked up what was left of his bottle of rye, and moved heavily off into the woods.

"Now what's the matter?" thought Harriet to herself. Aloud, she said quickly: "Wait, Father! I'm coming with you." He heard her, and waved her off with a gesture, but she followed him inexorably across the sand.

Edwina half rose, as if to follow them, and then evidently thought better of it. Julie Channing said to Nicholas as Edwina subsided again upon the sand: "Are you determined to leave to-morrow, on such short notice?"

"I suppose so," replied Nicholas evasively, catching sight once more of Linda's expressionless face, "but you never can tell. I may change my mind."

Linda suddenly came to life. Still without looking at Nicholas, she rose to her feet, and with a mumbled leave-taking, walked off alone. This time, Nicholas let her go. He made no attempt to follow her; and when she turned back at the edge of the woods to have one last look at him, she saw him standing beside the fire, throwing odd lengths of driftwood into the spurting flames, as though he meant to stay there for some time. Edwina rose to her feet, and put her arm through his, and he turned and said something to her with a smile.

With a choking sob, Linda turned and walked blindly along the dark, familiar path that led up the hill. For some reason it was unusually full of cobwebs that evening, and she had difficulty in brushing them off. The mussel shells, too, seemed extraordinarily numerous, and the stones in the roadbed got in her way . . . and the hill had never seemed longer.

CHAPTER XXX

THE horse which had replaced Lion was drawing the buck-board across the island from Juniper Cottage to the ferry landing. The August morning was cold and brisk, and there was a hint of autumn in the solid blue shadows which fell across the road; and the ocean beyond the woods was dark and glimmering. The buckboard turned a corner, and to Sam's amazement he came face to face with his employer. The apparition of Mr. Heseltine walking along the road across the island at that hour of the morning was so unusual, that Sam pulled up the horse in surprise.

"Good-morning!" said Mr. Heseltine. He waved his stick at the white horse. "What's his name? 'Major,' I suppose."

"No, his name's Dick."

"Ah! 'Moby Dick'!"

Sam answered that he was removing the Chadbournes' baggage to the ferry.

"So I see! So I see!" said Mr. Heseltine with a frown, noticing the heterogeneous collection of foreign labels on the hand luggage, and an impressive stack of canvases.

Sam added: "Mrs. Chadbourne is fussin' about that there spigot. I told her it hadn't worked right for years, but she seemed to think she had to leave it perfect. Mr. Chadbourne warn't around, so I fixed it for her. I told her I'd dig a vegetable garden for her in the spring, but she says she ain't comin' back here—that right?"

"Yes—unfortunately—that's right."

"Any reasons for it?"

"Plenty! . . ." murmured his employer.

"I kinda thought she liked it here," added Sam, puzzled. Mr. Heseltine wondered how Sam would react to the truth about Edwina if he knew it; and the buck-board rumbled off again through the woods. Mr. Heseltine remained where he was, thoughtfully knocking blue-

berries off a bush with his cane. Then, with a shrug, he moved on through the pattern of sunlight and shade, towards the sea. He passed the turnout for Juniper Cottage, but kept on. It was not Edwina that he wanted to see at the moment. His face looked tired and grey, and it was evident that he had spent a sleepless night. The road dipped, and at the bottom of the hill he could see Linda coming towards him; her water-bottle was slung around her neck, and she was burdened with a paintbox and a folding canvas stool. Mr. Heseltine sat down upon a bank of pine needles and waited for her. When she caught sight of him her footsteps faltered. "Hallo, Grandpa!" she murmured uneasily.

"You are going sketching, I presume?" he said in greeting.

"Yes," she answered briefly.

"Sit down," he added, "I want to talk to you a moment."

Linda sat down beside him as requested, and began picking blueberries off a bush at her elbow. Her expression was withdrawn and uncommunicative and she looked strangely mature. Mr. Heseltine longed to ask her point-blank whether she had said good-bye to Nicholas, but did not have the courage. He asked her instead if she had seen the new horse.

"No," said Linda, still uncommunicative.

"His name is Dick," went on Mr. Heseltine, "so I called him 'Moby Dick,' because he looks like a white whale."

"Does he? . . . Lion was black . . . It will seem funny," she added in a strained voice, "next summer, without either Lion, or the *Altair*!"

"Do you want another boat? I was thinking of giving you one." He yearned to give her something—anything—to take that look of painful maturity out of her eyes. "I thought we might go to Yarmouth next week, and buy you a nice little sloop—or perhaps you'd rather have one built to order?"

Linda shook her head. "No thanks, Grandpa." She looked down at her red nails without saying anything more. The enamel was chipping because she had been too listless and apathetic during the past week to give herself a manicure. The palms of her hands were calloused from her long hours at sea.

Her grandfather said to her tremulously: "I want you to have something that will make you happy—a boat, or anything else you want—to take the place of the *Altair*."

Yes, he would give her anything but her heart's desire; and again she fought down the bitterness in her soul—she had been fighting it all night. "All right," she said at last, "there is something you can give me! I want to go to art school in New York next winter. It won't cost much more than a boat."

"Art school!" he exclaimed. "So that's what you want, is it? Are you *sure*?"

"Positive. Do you mind?"

"Why, no! I'm delighted." She smiled faintly at that, and he added: "I'm told that you really paint very well!"

"Who told you?"—suspiciously.

"Nicholas."

Now the name was out. He looked at her obliquely, but her face was totally devoid of expression. She neither blushed nor grew pale, and Mr. Heseltine was astonished at her *sang-froid*. Seeing her, you would have thought that Nicholas had never existed. While he was still trying to figure out this phenomenon, she rose; and before he could tell her that he was on his way to say good-bye to Nicholas and Edwina, and ask her if she would like to go with him, she said quickly: "Well—so long!"—and with a kiss on the top of his head she was off down the sunlit road. He did not call her back.

"Apparently," he said to himself, "she's already said good-bye to him, and this must be the way it's affecting her."

Then he got up with a sigh, and retraced his steps to

Juniper Cottage. The small house was already afflicted with loneliness. The windows had no curtains in them, the canvas furniture had been removed from the porch, and there was no longer a plume of smoke waving from the chimney. Thinking that the house was already empty, he was about to return into the woods again, when he heard Edwina's voice calling to him.

"Here I am!" she said.

He turned, and saw her standing in the middle of the garden, knee-deep in lupines. One or two of the more virile plants had bloomed a second time, and she had a small bouquet of blue flowers in her hand. She was hatless, and the wind off the sea was blowing her dark hair. She had never seemed more miserable to him. It was not the desire of man for woman that he felt as he stood there watching her, but the simple yearning of an old man for beauty which was slipping out of his hands.

"Edwina!" he exclaimed feebly, "are you really going?"

It was a stupid question—there was the buckboard, full of luggage. She nodded. "Yes. I'm afraid so!"

"On this short notice?" he protested. "I can't get used to the idea!"

Edwina climbed up to him through the lupines. "Don't you think it's best for us to go this way—quickly, and without any fuss? I think Nicholas was right to do it suddenly. There was really no reason why we should have stayed here any longer—the picture was finished. He's doing the right thing. . . ."

"I suppose so," he sighed.

Edwina said firmly: "You'll be glad to be rid of us when we're gone."

He objected; and she added with a short laugh: "I thought we'd leave here under a cloud of some sort. But I didn't know it would be *this* cloud!"

"You're making too much of it," he told her with a frown. "You mustn't feel that way—we all want you to

come back next summer. You know that. Linda's young," he added, "she'll recover in no time."

"I wonder!" murmured Edwina.

Mr. Heseltine looked at her quizzically. "Evidently you think she won't. But then, you know, you're prejudiced!"

Edwina smiled. The kitten was playing around their legs, and she bent down and picked it up. "What are you going to do with the cat?" asked Mr. Heseltine, changing the subject.

"Take it home with me," Edwina replied.

"What's its name?"

"Ariadne."

From the other side of the island came the sharp toot of the ferry whistle, and Mr. Heseltine heard it. "You'd better go," he said slowly. "That means the ferry will leave in fifteen minutes."

"Yes, I know . . . You're not going with me to the dock?"

"No, if you don't mind, I'll think I'll go home now . . . I think I ate too much lobster last night, I feel a little winded, and it's a long way up the hill."

"You shouldn't have come!" she said remorsefully.

"I could have gone up to your house to say good-bye!"

He stood there helplessly while she put the kitten in a basket, and collected her hat and her purse. She was reluctant to leave him with such a look of dismay on his face, suffering from indigestion, and she lingered. "Good-bye, Edwina!" said Mr. Heseltine finally. "If you don't go now, you'll make the Captain mad, and he's liable to go to Port Hard without you. And you don't want that to happen, Edwina! You've waited for this moment for ten years."

"Yes," she said, "I have!"

"Go on!" he urged.

She left him with a kiss, and walked up the hill. He stood there for a long while after she had gone, staring at the garden. The delicate fragrance of the perfume she

used seemed to hover about him in the cool morning air—or was it the scent of her garden flowers? He didn't know. His eyes wandered over the blossoming hillside. Another woman—not Edwina—seemed to smile at him and nod to him from her knees among the lupines. He saw the rose which Edwina had transplanted in a cranny of the rocks and left to its fate, and his eyes glittered suspiciously. No one saw him, fortunately, but a wheeling gull—he was quite alone with his distress. It comforted him somewhat to reflect that the roses and the lupines would be in bloom there next summer, even though the women who had planted them were no longer with him . . . on the other hand, there might not be a "next summer." There was always that possibility, now that he was well over seventy. However, if he wasn't there to see them, the roses would bloom just the same. And with that thought to comfort him, he turned and walked slowly and solemnly back again, up the long hill.

CHAPTER XXXI

NICHOLAS was wandering impatiently among the lobster pots and other odd bits of tackle strewn around the dock, and as the buckboard full of his luggage came out of the woods he exclaimed in relief: "Ah! there you are, Sam! Do you want me to help you load that stuff on the ferry? Because I thought, if you didn't . . ."

His voice trailed off vaguely. Sam replied: "No, I don't need ye to help me. I can load it on myself." Nicholas tipped him liberally, and he added: "To bad you're leavin' us so soon! Kinda short notice, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and no," said Nicholas evasively. "Be careful of those canvases, will you? You might put a tarpaulin or something over them." With that, he walked away nervously up the hill. There was not much time left before the ferry sailed, and he was in a hurry. He was already

dressed for the journey in a dark suit and a stiff collar, and when Mrs. Heseltine saw him coming she gave a start.

"Then you are going, after all!" she exclaimed as he crossed her lawn. She was tying up a vine which had broken loose in a high wind during the night, and she put down the ball of twine she was using and held out her hand. "I don't want you to go!" she said.

"You know," he exclaimed, "I almost believe you don't!"

His eyes darted through the open door of the cottage. "Where's Linda?" he added, "isn't she here?"

"No, she's gone sketching."

"But that's absurd!" he exclaimed impatiently. "I told her I was leaving, last night. Whatever made her go off without seeing me?"

"I don't know—the child may have had an idea that she didn't want to say good-bye. Also, she may not have thought you were leaving this morning—you weren't sure yourself. You said you might change your mind."

"That's possible," said Nicholas doubtfully. "But I must see her, nevertheless."

"Do you think it's wise?"

"I don't know—but I've got to see her."

Mrs. Heseltine picked up the ball of twine again, hesitantly. The time was growing shorter. Nicholas said nervously. "Where is she—Singing Beach?"

"No," said Mrs. Heseltine slowly, "she's gone to the lighthouse. I don't think she'll go to Singing Beach for a while."

"You know everything, don't you?" he exclaimed.

Mary Heseltine answered him with a smile. "Yes," she said, "more than any one, probably. But I've kept my mouth shut."

Nicholas said agitatedly: "Look here!—there was something I wanted to say to you last night, but I didn't get a chance. I've wanted to say it for days. I think you know what it is? . . ."

"Yes . . . I suppose so."

"Forgive me, will you?"

She gave him another smile. "No one was to blame for this affair—it just happened. I've blamed myself, too—perhaps I shouldn't have let her go sketching with you so often. But you can't stop these affairs sometimes, no matter what you do."

She paused, and then went on again. "The sad part of it, to me, is that it happened to you and Linda and Edwina and myself—nice people with breeding. We're not 'fast' enough to handle a thing like this properly, I suppose. If we were, we could have taken the whole thing lightly and casually, with no hearts broken. But that was impossible."

Nicholas looked at her miserably. "Have I hurt you terribly? I seem to have a genius for hurting women I like—and I do like you!"

"Don't look at me that way!" she said more lightly, "with that hang-dog expression in your eyes! I'm not angry with you."

"You have every reason to be," he said flatly.

She shook her head. "Forget about me, now. You haven't much time left before the ferry sails, if you're going to the lighthouse."

"No, I suppose not. Good-bye, Mrs. Heseltine!" he murmured ruefully. And with that, he bent quickly, kissed her hand, and walked off into the enveloping woods. Startled and touched—for the British were reputed to be unemotional—Mrs. Heseltine sat down upon the top step of the porch, and absently watched a bumblebee hovering among the morning glory vines.

It did not take Nicholas very long to reach the lighthouse. As he came out of the woods in his haste, he was temporarily blinded by the wide expense of sea and sky ahead of him; and then he saw Linda sitting in front of the deserted buildings with her head bent over a drawing. She made his heart ache suddenly—she looked so young, and so forlorn, somehow! But she was totally unconscious of him, and he knew that a blessed oblivion

had made her forget everything but the lighthouse in front of her while she tried to paint it.

What struck him most, however, was the excellence of the little water colour she had managed to achieve without his aid.

Enthralled by what she was doing, he moved nearer through the blackberry vines, and Linda heard him. She looked up with a start, and when she saw the clothes he was wearing her face grew deadly pale.

"You are going, then!" she said slowly.

"I told you I was last night," Nicholas said irritably.

"Why didn't you come to Juniper Cottage to say good-bye, without making me run all the way out here?"

"I didn't believe you," she replied. "I thought that was all bluff, to make Grandpa happy. I thought you'd probably change your mind again this morning. What's the hurry?"

"Gertrude," he reminded her grimly, "wants a divorce."

"And you?" she hazarded, under her breath.

"I dread it," said Nicholas briefly. "It's a rotten business in England you know—I shan't go into the details, but they're rather horrid."

Linda wondered irrelevantly whether she was going to faint. Everything seemed black and immense around her, and her hands were freezing slowly. She was afraid that in another minute she would be lying in a heap at his feet.

To add to her confusion, Nicholas lapsed into silence.

A light breeze ruffled the sea in front of them, and as it passed shoreward it played for a moment in Nicholas's hair and made him look more untidy and less austere. His dark English clothes and his stiff collar had made him seem remote and slightly forbidding because she was not accustomed to them. But now, with his hair rumpled by the wind, he looked more like the man she had loved all summer, and who had held her in his arms.

Her courage returned gradually. If Nicholas would not

speak, she would. "And afterwards?" she asked him softly but clearly. "What are you going to do then?"

Nicholas gave a little sigh of defeat. "I thought it was going to be easier to tell you than this! While I was rushing through the woods I had the whole thing ready in my mind, but now——!"

Linda said to him firmly: "Stop feeling sorry for yourself! I know what you've come to tell me. You're going to marry Edwina—that's obvious."

"That's about it," he nodded. "That was partly what I came to tell you." Then his voice died again.

Far away down the sea towards Monhegan, Linda could hear the faint put-put of a lobster boat, and an unseasonable bird was singing in the woods across the point. She could hear the beat of her own heart, too, and it sounded uncannily loud. Finally Nicholas said: "I wonder if I can ever make you understand why I am doing this!"

Linda gave a shrug. "Why bother?"

"Because I want to 'bother.' Linda, I don't want you to grow bitter and cynical over this affair. If I married you, our happiness would be founded on something rather dreadful—the unhappiness of another person. When I was younger, and ran away with Edwina, that fact escaped me, but I appreciate it now. The last ten years of my life have been founded on something I did to Gertrude, and I don't want to make the same mistake again. I suppose it's partly selfishness, but I don't want to keep on living that way."

Linda made no comment, and her silence disturbed him. He said, scowling: "The thing is—I may not have been legally married to Edwina, but in every other way she has been my wife—and she's still in love with me. I owe her a lot."

Linda observed at this point: "She's the only woman you'd ever live in sin with, because—although your nerves would be harrowed—you'd still think it was worth while."

Nicholas ignored the remark, and added, anxiously: "Do you see what I mean?"

Linda shook her head. "I understand what you're trying to say, but that's not it!" She waved him off as he tried to interrupt her and said firmly: "No, let me talk! If you were in love with me, now, you'd run away with me, because that's the way you are. You've done it before without thinking, and you'd probably do it again. But you don't want me because you're in love with Edwina. Don't stop me!" she exclaimed as he said something in protest. "Let me say what I have to say, and then you can talk. You could never love me the way you love Edwina. I see that now. She's your type. She's beautiful, she's distinguished, and she's long-suffering. *I'm* not any of those things. Much as I love you, I don't think I could live with you the way she has. I'd want to be married to you, I'm afraid. Possessive, that's my type!" she added with a grim attempt at humour.

Nicholas, however, saw nothing even faintly amusing in what she was saying. He was disconcerted by her feminine intuition—because he *was* fundamentally in love with Edwina; she was the "woman in his bones." That made this affair with Linda infinitely worse. If he had not loved Edwina there might have been some excuse for him.

"You don't love me," she said again, rubbing salt into his wound. "You never did."

"That's where you're wrong," he said quickly. "Women never seem to understand these things. As you say, I am fundamentally in love with Edwina, but that hasn't stopped me from being genuinely fond of you."

"Fond!" she echoed with a disparaging gasp.

"This is a poor way of showing it, I admit. But I do love you. And I suppose I've hurt you terribly."

"No. Not mortally, that is. I'll survive. I don't know how, exactly, but—"

He pointed to the sketch on her lap. "Stick to that for

a while, if you can. I'll never be a good artist, but you may be, some day."

"Sublimation . . ." she murmured.

"Now you're being cynical! And that's just what I don't want you to be! You sound," he added with a sudden grin, "just like your Aunt Harriet! Isn't that warning enough? Isn't it?" he repeated teasingly, but she would not smile at him. He knelt down in the grass and took her hands, and gently made her look at him. "Linda, my dear—I must go now, the ferry's waiting! But I don't want to leave you like this—positively hating me! Please don't feel quite so bitter towards me!"

"I don't hate you!" she answered in surprise. "What makes you think I do? But there's not much use in my loving you any more, is there? You're going to marry Edwina."

"You mustn't look at it that way," he argued. "I'm simply not going to leave her. You must forget that I'm not married to her."

"I wonder," said Linda softly after a pause, "what it is that Edwina has, that I haven't got?"

From the other side of the island came the shrill piping of the ferry whistle. Saying nothing, Nicholas laid her hand against his cheek. A white-throat was singing behind them in the woods, with a minor, falling little song, the voice of autumn. The ferry blew again, with ~~more~~ vigour. Linda turned her eyes away from the lighthouse, and looked at Nicholas. He put her hand against his lips wordlessly; and then dropped it and walked slowly away across the sunlit field into the woods.

